

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF MARITAL ONENESS

—COMPLEMENTARITY WITHOUT HIERARCHY

A THESIS

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To my parents, now in Heaven, who demonstrated with their lives what unconditional love and total commitment are all about.

To James, my love, who loves me just as Christ loves His Bride. I am so blessed.

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ABSTRACT

Traditional teaching on marriage within the conservative, evangelical population often emphasizes male headship, a concept that has been widely accepted as biblical and God-ordained. A closer look at relevant passages in the Scripture shows that the validity of such a concept is questionable. A biblical theology of marital oneness is developed that shows God's original intent for a married couple was to procreate and have dominion over the earth together as equal partners. Hierarchy in marriage as seen in many marriages throughout history is a result of the fallen condition of humankind, not the original blueprint for marriage as designed by God. It is vital that Christian men and women come together to live out the oneness and unity that God intended from the very beginning to reflect His image and bring Him glory.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

The Woman Who was Sentenced to Death

Mara, a woman in her 30s, was married to an alcoholic man who did not bring a dime home but kept relying on his wife to feed him and tend to his needs. They had a seven-year-old son who was far more mature than other children his age, as he was witnessing the tension and fights between his mother and father day in and day out. Mara was working very hard to make ends meet while being the best mother she could be. Yet there was never enough money for an alcoholic. Hunger and poverty gradually wore out Mara's sanity. One day while she was wandering on the street with an empty stomach and empty pockets, she spotted someone dropping a wallet on the ground while running away. She picked up the wallet without thinking. And yes, there inside of it, she found money! But while she was rejoicing over this unexpected "blessing," two policemen ran up to her and arrested her at the scene. Before she had a chance to explain what had just happened, she was hand-cuffed and brought to the police station. The charge: murder!

The wallet actually belonged to a rich, old man. The robber who robbed the old man killed him in the act, and while he was running away for his life, he dropped the wallet he had just taken. Mara, on the other hand, only wanted some money to feed her family. She hadn't harmed anyone. But the prosecutor for the case was *sure* that she was the murderer. And since neither Mara's husband nor her son had the resources to provide for Mara's defense, no one believed in what Mara said.

So the execution date came. Mara died by hanging. Case closed.

Many years later, the seven-year-old became a grown man, rich and successful. One day he saw the prosecutor who was very sure that his mother was the murderer. He remembered his face. How could he forget? He went up to the prosecutor, slowly and calmly, with a wrathful stare said, “You were so *sure* my mother was the murderer years ago. Did you see her kill the man?” The prosecutor, then an old man dying from a terminal disease, did not—could not—say a word.

Yet Mara was dead, and nothing could be done.¹

The above was only a story. Yet this story is happening every day all over the world: at home and in the church. There are people who are so *sure* of their interpretation of certain passages of the Bible that out of their *certainty* they silence women in the church and subjugate women at home. That is their sentence for women. Case closed.

Are They So Sure?

In 1991, reputable pastor John Piper and seminary professor Wayne Grudem edited and compiled a 566-page volume of works by twenty-two authors called *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* to, as the subtitle of the book suggests, respond to evangelical feminism. Whereas Piper and Grudem considered the writers who endorsed an evangelical feminist view as brothers and sisters in Christ, they also considered “their essential position to be wrong in the light of Scripture, and ultimately harmful to the family and the church.”² According to Grudem, “submission to one’s

¹ This was the story line of a Chinese TV soap opera called “Righteousness without Mercy” broadcast in Hong Kong in 1989.

² John Piper and Wayne A. Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), xiii.

husband is not optional for Christian wives...leadership...is not optional for Christian husbands.”³

In an attempt to define manhood and womanhood, Piper wrote:

At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man’s differing relationships.

At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman’s differing relationships.⁴

Now look at some of the readers’ reviews of this book:

This book made me cry...Equal but different, I'm okay with but to say that a woman cannot lead and then to create a list of acceptable professions in which she may work? That's not equal. That is subjugation. If God intends women to be the subject of her husband or male domination/leadership in general—regardless of how "godly" her husband/man is to treat her, that is not equality. How can you be equal in the eyes of God but not equal in the world? That would mean God is deviant, sexist, misogynistic and repulsive—a God that I no longer want anything to do with...

I will not worship a God that does not make women an equal in this world. I think that men and women both bring equal value to the world and are neither subject to one another. This book made me ill. Who wants to bring children into such a horrible world where 50% of them will be told—sorry you don't have a penis so you can't do that. Horrible. Just horrible.⁵

Another reader’s review goes like this:

The book's whole concentration is on subjugating females to males. It's about all the things females are to do to serve the male sex, particularly the husband. There is almost nothing about what men or husbands are supposed to do for their wives.

If the material in this book is correct, why would any woman want to get married? The way husband-wife relationships are described in this book is that the relation exists for the benefit of the husband, not the wife. A woman would be better off single than being in the type of marriage relationship this book describes.

³ Ibid., 207. What Grudem meant was: submission to one’s husband is not merely optional for Christian wives, it is essential; likewise, leadership is not optional for Christian husbands, it is essential.

⁴ Ibid., 36-37.

⁵ This review is found on <http://www.amazon.com> by someone whose pen name is “Reader.”

If the material in this book is correct why would any woman want to attend church? Her only function would be as a servant to lift up the male leaders of the church. She would be better off spending her time elsewhere where she is permitted to use all her gifts.

This book is the best argument I know for why women should not marry or go to church.⁶

Despite such strong reactions from readers of Piper and Grudem's book which was honored by *Christianity Today* as the 1992 Book of the Year, numerous Christian churches and families are practicing what this book preaches, whether out of obedience or tradition. A sentence has been carried out. To some, this is a done deal. Case closed.

But is this really what the Bible teaches? Is this really a "biblical" recovery of manhood and womanhood? Are they so sure that what they believe and how they understand the Bible are flawless and warrant all who claim to be washed by the blood of Jesus to follow?

Uncomforting Statistics

Southern Baptists are among evangelicals who generally believe God has ordained the man to be the leader of the household. In pulpits, Wednesday evening prayer meetings, marriage seminars and Christian counseling sessions they urge wives to engage in "gracious submission" to their husbands' "servant leadership."⁷ Yet according to the *Associate Press* (12/30/99), Baptists have the highest divorce rate of any Christian denomination, and are more likely to get a divorce than atheists and agnostics, according

⁶ This review is found on www.amazon.com by someone whose pen name is "Apple Tree."

⁷ Marie Griffith and Paul Harvey, "Wifely Submission" from *Christian Century*, July 1, 1998, Vol. 115, Issue 19.

to a national survey.⁸ If wifely submission and male leadership is God's blueprint for marriage, why is it that the Christian group that seems to most faithfully follow this blueprint also turns out to be most dissatisfied with their marriages?

In their book *Battered into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home*, James and Phyllis Alsdurf, a husband and wife team, citing their findings from eight years of extensive research and interviews with domestic violence victims, wrote:

The distribution of power can be badly skewed in the Christian home. Fortified by preaching that accepts all sorts of cultural assumptions about what "headship" means, abusers often use Scripture as ammunition for their misuse of power. One battered wife noted, "While the hierarchy of marriage can produce profound humility in some men, in others it can be fuel to flames of dominance and even violence. Wives of such men, obedient to their misconception of submission, often reinforce their husbands' violent or antisocial behavior."⁹

Also, they wrote:

The connection which many battered women make between their ability to suffer violence from their husbands and their Christian commitment reflects, we believe, what is widely taught within evangelical churches about the submission of women in marriage. It is a perspective which makes women more susceptible to violence and heightens the likelihood that battered women will remain in abusive relationships long after they should.¹⁰

This "submission of women in marriage" is indeed widely taught within evangelical churches. Just pick almost any book on marriage and family written by evangelical authors, well-known or not so well-known, and see what the authors teach:

Because a wife's submission is "as unto the Lord," she can submit to even an unbeliever, or a weak Christian husband, with security and assurance. For the

⁸ This statement is based on a survey conducted by Barna Research Group in Ventura, CA. It was found that 29 percent of all adult Baptists have been through a divorce. Among Christian groups, only those who attend non-denominational Protestant churches were more likely to be divorced, with a 34 percent divorce rate.

⁹ James Alsdurf and Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989), 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

Lord will be her “husband” and provide the protection she and her family need. God honors the wife’s submission by providing his own spiritual strength. ...in the spiritual realm, husbands are the “designated leaders.” It is the men who are charged with the responsibility for nurturing and protecting those over whom they have been made the spiritual head—as if their wives were weaker, remembering that they are joint heirs before God.¹¹

If a decision must be made, the wife is called upon to defer to her husband, trusting God to guide him to make a decision out of love for her as the responsible head of the marriage.¹²

God assigns man the role of leader for the function of the family. He should initiate activities and discussions and guide the affairs of the family. Yes, he will have the last word, but he also has the duties that go with it...¹³

A healthy, two-parent family is one where the man is household leader in every area. The divine family model holds the man as head with the wife and children as a family extension of the man (Gal. 5). Their character and attitudes reflect his model and his leadership.¹⁴

In the New Testament, Paul and Peter both teach clearly about head/subordinate relationships in the family. The wife...is to be subject to her husband as the church is subject to Christ; ... Even if her husband is not obedient to God she is to obey him and quietly display by her behavior the attractiveness of a meek and quiet spirit (1 Peter 3:1-6).¹⁵

And finally, from a German theologian,

The man is called to be head in both natural and the spiritual realms, that is to be the spiritual leader in marriage and to assume special responsibility for the ordinary affairs of life. Being head always means exercising chief responsibility in all aspects of married and family lifestyle. The husband whose headship is modelled on Christ’s relieves his wife of a burden. Just as the church can take comfort from entrusting its leadership to Christ, so can a wife by letting her husband have the final say in all issues relating to the marriage. The husband, on the other hand, is obliged to relieve his wife of the burden of the final decision and responsibility before God.¹⁶

¹¹ F. LaGard Smith, *Men of Strength for Women of God: Has the Time Come for Shared Spiritual Leadership* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1989), 236-38.

¹² Emerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect* (Brentwood: InterVarsity Publishers, 2004), 218.

¹³ Charles M. Sell, *Achieving the Impossible: Intimate Marriage* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1982), 162.

¹⁴ Ray E. Ballmann with Tim and Windy Echols, *Solid Rock Families in a Crumbling World* (Chandler: Alpha Omega Publications, 1998), 38.

¹⁵ Paul E. Steele and Charles C. Ryrie, *Meant to Last: A Christian View of Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage* (Wheaton: Victor Books: 1984), 32.

¹⁶ Werner Neuer, *Man & Woman in Christian Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway books, 1991), 125.

So is the wife supposed to submit to her husband, even when he is an unbeliever who beats her, because “the Lord will be her ‘husband’ and provide the protection she and her family need”?

If the husband is the “designated leader” in the marriage and family and will always have the “last word” in “every area,” and if this is indeed a “divine family model,” is it not true that the minute the wife has any doubt about this whole system, questions its validity, or wants to use her own mind to find out the *truth* of the matter and draw her *own* conclusion, she is already, by definition, not being submissive? It is not unlike trying to prove that a car can run seventy-five miles per hour smoothly on a road where the speed limit is fifty-five miles per hour. That is, one will never be able to prove the capability of the car without breaking the rule!

Uncompromising Convictions

There is another interesting piece of news worth looking at: The Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT), the largest state convention of Southern Baptists, has rejected the national Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) statement of beliefs because of the statement's call for wives to "submit graciously" to their husbands. Paige Patterson, SBC president, commented, "Now it is up to the churches to decide with whom they agree—with a liberal, culturally acceptable view of family and church, or with a Christ-honoring, Bible-believing perspective."¹⁷ Here Patterson is implying that one cannot stay “neutral” in this matter. According to him, it is an “either/or” alliance with the “liberal” or the “biblical.” Again two groups of Bible-believing evangelicals who belong to the same denomination have different convictions about what they believe is the truth.

¹⁷ Source: “Submission Rejected,” from *Christianity Today*, December 6, 1999, Vol. 43, Issue 14.

The Myth of Christian Marriage

A mother once asked her thirteen-year-old son, “When you grow up, will you want to marry someone who will always listen to you, agree with you and be submissive to you?” The son replied, “Mom, do you think I’m dumb? Of course I would want someone who is an equal. Actually whether in a friend or a wife, what I want is someone I can talk to, communicate with...”¹⁸ Even the simple answer of a thirteen-year-old expresses more of an egalitarian viewpoint of marriage. A group of atheists once attended a wedding of their high school friend who happened to be a Christian. When the pastor preached to the bride and groom, he emphatically told the bride that she needed to be submissive to her husband as her head, even in things where she was more knowledgeable. Whereas the Christians who were attending the wedding found nothing new in the preacher’s sermon, the bride’s high school friends were shocked to hear such a preaching in twentieth-century America. They did not hesitate to express to the bride the discriminatory tone of the pastor shortly after the wedding.¹⁹ Again the notion of headship and submission does not seem to be inviting at all to non-believers to describe what Christian marriage ought to be like.

When two born-again Christians, male and female, find the love of their life, commit to spend the rest of their lives together, with the blessing of God and witness of man, vow to be faithful and loyal to their life-partner, till death do them part, one would expect that heaven would fall into their world the moment the veil lifts. Yet reality clearly shows that many Christian marriages grow cold as the partners grow old. Marriages fall short of expectations. Many even end in tragic divorce. Now does the

¹⁸ It was an actual conversation between the author of this paper and her then 13-year-old boy.

¹⁹ This was what actually took place at the wedding of the author of this paper in June, 1990 in Houston, TX.

Bible really provide a clear blueprint of what a healthy marriage should be like? Is the traditional teaching of headship and submission truly a biblical concept if people that adhere to its rules experience marital failure? Or is it the case that only when what the Bible says about marriage is rightly grasped that heaven will truly be brought closer to home? Does the word “Christian” when attached to the word “marriage” automatically imply a blessing? Or does it mean a “curse”? If there are two different and opposing views out there regarding marriage held by godly men and women who are totally committed to the Word, to whom are the husband and wife supposed to listen? Is there even room for discussion? Or must the husband automatically assume leadership and authority over his wife the moment they say, “I do,”?

Revisiting the Case of Christian Marriage

As quoted in the beginning of this paper, Piper and Grudem believe an egalitarian marriage is not what the Bible teaches, and that this position will ultimately bring harm to the family and the church. However, it can also be argued the other way: husbands and wives are meant to be equal partners. Judith K. Balswick and Jack O. Balswick wrote the following in a chapter titled “Marriage as a Partnership of Equals,” in the 528-page volume *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*:

In equal partnership marriages the locus of authority is placed in the relationship, not in one spouse or the other. Even though it may take longer to arrive at a joint decision, as the couple listens, honors and respects each other’s opinion, they move toward a united stance. It adds the dimension of “we-ness” and mutual accountability as each one takes a responsibility role in decisions that are made.²⁰

²⁰ Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, general editors, *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 452.

An erroneous understanding of what a biblical marriage should be like brings enormous damage to the individual, the marriage, the family, the church, the society and ultimately the kingdom of God.

Bruce C. E. Fleming, author of the book *Familiar “Leadership” Heresies Uncovered*, whose understanding of men and women in marriage as revealed in the Scripture differs from that of Piper and Grudem greatly, wrote in the introduction of his book:

Some heresies pervert the message of salvation and keep people from finding new life in Christ. Other heresies distort the way life is to be lived in Christ, causing great individual hurt and weakening the church.

... The word “heresy”... means, “This teaching, or belief, is toxic! Don’t feed on it! Don’t give it to others! Keep it away from children and grownups too! If you find it implanted in your doctrines or practices dig it up by the roots and replace it with proper theology.”

A heresy harms all those who touch it. Those holding to a false and heretical teaching are made spiritually sick and weak. Those spreading this false doctrine—knowingly or unknowingly—are liars (!) who need to be silenced and corrected. Any heresy is a serious matter, which must be dealt with seriously.

Just like cancer, a heresy cannot be ignored or tolerated. It must be cleaned out and the truth of Scripture must go in its place.²¹

So what is closer to the truth? Whose “view” is closer to God’s original intent? Is it an egalitarian model of marriage or a man-lead-wife-submit model? What does the Bible really say about men and women and marriage? What is the biblical purpose of marriage? How are teachings on marriage affecting the quality of people’s marriage and sense of personhood? Is there too much emphasis being put on the concept of “headship” and “submission” in Christian marriage when the concept of “headship” may not even

²¹ Bruce C. E. Fleming, *Familiar “Leadership” Heresies Uncovered* (Eugene: Resource Publications, 2005), 4.

exist in the Bible and the meaning of “submission” is vastly unclear? What does the Bible emphasize more regarding marriage: oneness or distinct roles? Do Christians marry for happiness or holiness? Is there a better way to look at marriage and a better approach to make marriage work that is not merely for a man's and woman's pleasure but ultimately for God's glory?

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Marriage is neither heaven nor hell, it is simply purgatory.
~ Abraham Lincoln

It is one of humankind's most common experiences, yet also one of the most mysterious. It is what some people treasure the most; but what some dread the most. There are those who are willing to die for it, and there are also those who are dying because of it.

It is marriage.

Marriage is not a manmade institution. It is a God-designed relationship. It has been around since the beginning of time, yet people still find it fascinating. Score of books have been written on it, and still a lot of questions remain unanswered. The best way to understand marriage, of course, is to inquire of the one who designed it in the first place. This chapter will take a look at selected passages from the Word of God and see what God has to say about marriage.

What the Old Testament Has to Say about Marriage: A Closer Look at Genesis 1-3

Although marriage can be described as a universal phenomenon, it is not a human invention. It was designed by God and was first made in Eden. A closer look at selected passages from Genesis 1-3 reveals the marital dynamics of the very first human couple and gives insight into the purpose of marriage and also the challenge of marriage after sin entered the world. What happened in the beginning of history and the drama that took place in Eden indeed impacted the rest of the human race.

The Creation

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:26-27).

The first chapter of the first book of the Bible, Genesis 1, gives an overview of God’s creation. The word “man” first appeared here in Genesis 1:26 and it is the word *adam* in Hebrew. When *adam* is used with the article, as in this case, it becomes a common noun meaning mankind or human being. Note that after God said, “Let us make man in our image,” He said, “let *them* rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air...” In other words, after God created the light, the sky, the water, the land, the vegetation, the stars and creatures of every kind, He created human beings in the plural form, just as God is “plural” as God said, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, in *our* likeness.”

In the very beginning after humankind was created, God gave them, male and female, authority to rule over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground. There was no differentiation in the nature of commissioning to the male and female at this point. Also note that since God is spirit (John 4: 24), when God said He created humankind in the divine image, it was not referring to a physical image and likeness. Here “image” has the implication that God created mankind, both male and female, as a representative figure to represent Him and reflect Him on the earth.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Gen. 1:28).

After God created humankind, the first thing God did to them was to “bless” them. But it was not the first time that God blessed something in this way. In Genesis 1:22, after God created the living creatures in the sea and the birds in the sky, He blessed them also and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” However, what God said to the human beings who were created in God’s image and likeness was not only to “be fruitful and increase the number; fill the earth,” but also to “*subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground*” (Gen. 1:28, emphasis the author’s). Note that God has clearly given man (both male and female) authority over other creatures. Indeed the word “subdue” is *kabash* in Hebrew. It implied strength was required to conquer the earth. It hinted that something hostile already existed at that point. So the mandate for the couple was three-fold: to be fruitful, to subdue the earth, and to rule over all other creatures. The mandate was given to both the man and the woman and it took them both together to do what God told them to. For neither of them could procreate alone. Without procreation there would be no filling of the earth.

Whereas Genesis 1 gives an overview of creation, Genesis 2 acts as a flashback, zooming into some particulars of the creation process. This is not an unusual way of writing in Hebrew literature.

The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (Gen. 2:7)

Note that the word used here is “formed” rather than “created.” They are two different words in the Hebrew language. As it says in Genesis 1:27 that “male and female he created them,” it can be inferred that whereas God created the man and the woman

simultaneously, the man was formed, or fashioned, or elaborated first. Also, here the specific man (“the man”) is mentioned, not just mankind as in the previous chapter.

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” (Gen. 2:18-23)

Everything that God had created had been good up to this point. Here it was the first time that God said something was not good. The thing that was not good had nothing to do with the design, the quality, the substance or the personhood of the man. In other words, there was nothing intrinsically bad about the man. Rather, “It is not good *for* the man *to be alone*” (emphasis the author’s). And yet God knew what He was going to do. He was going to “make a helper suitable for him.” Note that the “helper” God was going to make for the man was to alleviate the “not good” scenario the man was in, that was, his aloneness.

Now God did not just make something for the man. The words were carefully chosen to describe what God was going to make for the man. He was going to make a “helper suitable” for him. “Helper suitable” translates the Hebrew words *‘ezer kenegdo*. A more accurate translation would be “help corresponding-to-him.”²²

The noun, *‘ezer* is found 21 times in the Old Testament. It means “help,” or the older English word “succour”... The word is found twice in Genesis 2. In 16 of the other 19 occurrences of the word, the “help” spoken of refers to help which comes from one who is superior. In most cases, the “help” is God Himself... In

²² Joy Elasky Fleming with J. Robin Maxon, *Man and Woman in Biblical Unity* (Minneapolis, CBE: 1993), 8.

those instances where ‘ezer does not refer to God it is used of such people as kings, who come to the help of another. Someone who is a “help” is a powerful entity who possesses strength and resources...

The second Hebrew word *kenegdo* communicates additional meaning... What is emphasized is the common nature and essence of the two beings, as well as their equality.²³

When God brought all the creatures to the man for him to name them, it was likely that the creatures came to him in pairs. It says in Genesis 2:20: “So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. *But* for the man no suitable helper was found” (emphasis the author’s). After naming all the creatures which all had their counterparts, the man realized that he did not have one. No wonder when he woke up and saw the woman, he was excited, amazed, jubilant and immediately realized she was taken out of his very being. She was bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. They were intimately connected. They were two, yet came from one. Note that here when the man said she “shall be called ‘woman’,” he was not naming her as he did to the other creatures. He was simply stating the fact that she was taken out of man. The Hebrew word for woman, *ishshah*, sounds like the Hebrew for man, *ish*. It was actually the feminine form of man.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame. (Gen. 2:24-25)

In God’s creation, the very first human relationship formed was that between a man and a woman, a husband and a wife. Genesis 2:24 is the only marriage text in the Bible quoted both by Jesus and by Paul in the New Testament.²⁴ God has given the keys to a healthy marriage here. It is important for a man to leave his parents, become

²³ Ibid., 8-9.

²⁴ Jesus has quoted this passage in Matthew 19:5 and Mark 10:7 and Paul has quoted the same passage in Ephesians 5:31.

independent from them, in order to be united to his wife to form the one-flesh relationship. This one-flesh relationship is to unite a man and a woman spiritually, emotionally and physically. It is an exclusive relationship in the sense that physical union between two people is only legitimate within a marital relationship. On the other hand, even though a parent and a child have that biological bonding, they will never become “one flesh.” Gilbert Bilezikian in his book, *Beyond Sex Role*, wrote,

The concepts of reciprocal dependency and mutuality in equality are intrinsic to the doctrine of oneness... A child is unilaterally dependent on his parents. Normally, his parents are not dependent on him... However, because husband and wife are mutually dependent in a relationship of equality, they “become one flesh” and their bond is characterized by permanency.²⁵

The fact that the man and the woman were naked and felt no shame indicated their relationship was marked by total trust, transparency and truthfulness. There was nothing to hide from one another and nothing to be ashamed of. There was no need of privacy because the two were living a truly shared, communal life in the absence of sin and corruption when everything was still good from within and without.

The Fall

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

²⁵ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 35.

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”
The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” (Genesis: 3:6-13)

Before the woman came into being, or when the woman was still *in* the man, God gave the man a commandment. He told the man that he “must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” for when he ate of it he would “surely die” (Gen. 2:16). “Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made” (Gen. 3:1). The serpent approached the woman who had not received the prohibition from God directly, and tempted her to eat the forbidden fruit. The woman who was completely innocent and had no way to comprehend what death meant at that point, was deceived by the serpent and took the fruit and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it too. Note that the man who knew first-hand the consequence of eating the forbidden fruit was silent the whole time. Also note that it was after they both ate the fruit that “the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked” (Gen. 3:7). Why were the woman’s eyes not opened right after she ate the fruit? If that were the case, the man might be able to see what happened after the woman ate the fruit and might have chosen not to follow what the woman did. Although that might only be a very short time between the woman and the man eating the fruit, the fact that their eyes were not opened until both of them ate the fruit could be significant. Could it mean that they were still in that perfect one-flesh relationship, and that it was only when the act of disobedience was completed by both of them, the consequence of the act would have befallen them?

For the first time in the couple's lives, they had to do something "for themselves" (Gen. 3:7). Before the Fall, God had blessed them, provided for them everything they needed and also given them authority to rule over all the created creatures. After the Fall, God was no longer central in their lives. Their allegiance was to one another. God was absent in the picture. The couple started to feel certain emotions that were not there before: shame, fear, nakedness and insecurity. Sin escalated, as seen in the man's response to what God asked him.

When God asked the man where he was, he could have simply answered truthfully. But he was so afraid that he hid. He hid because he did not want God to find him. And when God further asked him who told him he was naked and whether he had eaten the forbidden fruit, the man did not give God straightforward answers. God was actually giving the man an opportunity to confess! Yet he did not admit his own wrong. Rather, he blamed both the woman and God. On the other hand, when God asked the woman what she had done, her answer was right on the mark: "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Gen. 3:13). She told what happened exactly. Yes, she was deceived by the serpent. And yes, she ate.

The Bad News and the Good

So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. (Gen. 3:14-20)

This is a pivotal passage in the Bible. The history of the entire human race hinged on what took place right here, yet this familiar passage has been quoted and misquoted time after time. Some people call this the "curse" passage and presume that the serpent, the man and the woman were all cursed. They say the serpent was cursed and that is why the serpent is crawling on the ground today. Humankind was cursed and that is why people have to work hard to make a living. Woman was cursed and that is why childbirth is painful. Worse still, some people infer from this passage that man is to rule over woman and that is a fact, a predetermined condition as decreed in the Word of God. A closer look at this passage will show that neither the man nor the woman was cursed by God and that what God said here was not all bad news.

After the Fall, everything changed. After a brief conversation with both the man and the woman, God alone was doing the talking as He pronounced what was going to happen as a consequence of the couple's sin. God was talking to the serpent first, then to the woman and finally to the man. There was a stark similarity in the way God addressed the serpent and the man. Note that it was only the serpent and the ground that were cursed. Neither the woman nor the man was cursed by God. And the good news in Genesis 3:15 was that redemption was already on God's mind when sin entered the world. For God

was going to put enmity between the serpent and the woman. And the woman's offspring was going to crush the serpent's head, whereas the serpent could only strike his heel.

One of the most misunderstood Scripture is in the following verses. The King James Version had a more accurate translation here:

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. (Gen. 3:16-17)

Rather than increasing the pains in childbearing, God was going to multiply greatly the woman's sorrow and conceptions. So there were indeed two things that God was going to multiply for the woman. The first one was the same sorrowful toil that the woman was going to endure with the man. Since the ground was cursed, from then on it would take great effort to tend the ground in order to eat of it. The Hebrew word, *'itsebon*, used in verse 16 for the word "sorrow" is the same word that is used for "sorrow" in verse 17. In other words, both the man and woman were going to reap the consequence of the ground being cursed and need much hard work in order to make a living. On the other hand, the good news was that God did not forget His mandate for the man and woman to be fruitful and increase in number (Gen. 1:26), so He was still going to multiply the woman's conceptions. The second "sorrow" in Genesis 3:16 is translated from a different Hebrew word, *'etsev*, which means, "with effort." Since the first couple no longer lived in a sinless world, their bodies were no longer immortal and everything else was affected, including the childbirth process. God was foretelling to the woman what would happen at the time of childbirth.

In the second half of Genesis 3:16 God continued to say to the woman, “thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” The word “desire” here did not necessarily carry any negative connotation. Bruce Fleming in his book, *Familiar “Leadership” Heresies Uncovered*, commented that God was checking the woman’s heart and found that she still desired her husband. “The word ‘love’ has not been used in the Bible anywhere thus far, but it fits here.”²⁶ In other words, the woman’s passion for the man had not changed much after the Fall, she still desired her husband. Yet the husband was going to “rule over” her. Note that this is a description of what was going to happen. It is not a prescription of what should be happening. And the man did name his wife Eve not long after the Fall, clearly showing his act of “ruling over” the woman.

Lessons Learned from the First Couple:

The God-intended, one-flesh relationship between the first couple was destroyed when sin entered the world. The man willfully disobeyed God while the woman, being deceived, fell into transgression. God cursed neither the man nor the woman. He only cursed the serpent and the ground. Yet death was already at work as the penalty for sin and mortality became a fact of life. Both were to experience sorrow and toil while the woman would experience added pain in her childbirth. The good news was that God did not rescind His original blessing as to have them be fruitful and multiply, yet the relational dynamics between the man and the woman were not the same. Whereas the woman’s desire was still for the husband, the husband would turn around and rule over her. This was God’s prediction of what would happen, but never His prescription of what should take place.

²⁶ Bruce C. E. Fleming, *Familiar “Leadership” Heresies Uncovered* (Eugene: Resource Publications, 2005), 42.

Oneness is still God's ideal for marriage. Yet it will not come naturally for nothing is "natural" after the Fall. Much grace and perhaps grace alone is what can make this original ideal happen, even if not in full measure on this side of the Garden.

Taking a closer look at what actually happened in the Garden and what God did really say at the most tragic event that literally changed the course of history and affected the whole human race could perhaps soften people's hearts towards one another, for all are sinners from within and without. This may also make one appreciate His mercy and grace more, for without it, humankind could have fallen much lower. God is a loving and forgiving God. He already had redemption in place before the punishment of sin was fully displayed.

It is worth noting that in the first few chapters of Proverbs, King Solomon painted a picture of how the father and mother share parenting responsibilities: "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching" (Prov. 1:8); "When I was a boy in my father's house, still tender, and an only child of my mother" (Prov. 1:3); "My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching" (Prov. 6:20). Also in Proverbs 31, the noble woman portrayed in the passage was not only a caring wife and loving mother²⁷ but also a successful business woman.²⁸ She carried out both aspects of the commandment in Genesis 1:28, namely, procreation and dominion over the earth. God made man and woman to be one with Him and with one another. They were to fill the earth and rule over it *together*. Communion with God and with one another in love is what humankind was created for. It is also in such a

²⁷ Proverbs 31:11: "Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value." Proverbs 31: 28: "Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her."

²⁸ Proverbs 31:16-18: "She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night."

relationship marked by oneness and intimacy that true satisfaction is found and deep longing is met. God never intended one human person to rule over another. Any form of oppression from one human person over another is only a result of the Fall.

What the New Testament has to Say about Marriage: A Closer Look at Ephesians 5:18-33

The last portion of Ephesians 5 is a favorite passage that people use often in weddings, pre-marital counseling, marriage conferences and even Sunday sermons. The most familiar, traditional teaching from this passage is this: the husband is the head of the household, the wife is to submit to the husband's leadership; he is the designated one to make all important final decisions regarding household affairs; he is the spiritual leader in the family and has God-given authority over his wife. Some people will go further as to say that after the father, the sons are the next in line to be the head of the family. And by "head" it is assumed that it means "authority," "power over" and "decision maker." A doctrine of male headship/leadership has been developed from this passage.

Is male headship really a biblical concept? Does the Bible state explicitly that the husband is the spiritual leader of the wife? What was the historical/cultural context in which this epistle was written? What can be inferred from the grammatical structure of the passage about the true authorial intent? How does this passage fall in line with the teachings of the rest of the Scripture?

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now

as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. (Ephesians 5:18-24)

Understanding what kind of cultural background was in place when Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Ephesus is crucial to unlocking the message in this passage. Marriage during the first century in that culture could be likened to a form of slavery. Teenage girls were wedded to men much older than they were, usually in their thirties. The primary objective for the men in finding a wife was to bear them a legal heir. Love and affection were simply not expected in a marriage. Rather, the wife was expected to “obey” her husband. Male headship was simply assumed and exercised as a matter of fact. Generally speaking, the women had neither rights nor voice. It is in this kind of background that Paul was addressing the husband and wife on how they should treat one another now that they were both members of God’s household (Eph. 2: 19).

The Key Commandment

Ephesians 5:22-33 has often been quoted as a unit to exhort people on how to treat one another within a marriage. However, it must be noted that, in contradiction with traditional interpretations, a direct and precise translation of Ephesians 5:22 would be: “wives, with your own husbands, as with the Lord.”²⁹ There is no verb in this verse in the original Greek text. The verb, which should be a participle, is borrowed from the previous verse. The paragraph cannot begin in verse 22. Indeed, it cannot begin in verse 21 either. The closest imperative is found in verse 18. The King James Version has a more accurate translation of the following verses:

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;
Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,

²⁹ A. Nyland, *The Source New Testament* (Parramatta, N.S.W.: Smith and Stirling Publishing: 2004), 500.

Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;
Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the
name of our Lord Jesus Christ;
Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.
(Eph. 5:18-21)

The key injunction here to the saints in Ephesus was to “be filled with the Spirit.” Paul then pointed out to the Ephesians the things that believers would do and should do when they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and that included: speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord, giving thanks always to God and submitting themselves to one another in the fear of God. In other words, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to do all those things without being filled with the Holy Spirit. What believers needed to focus on was to be willing to allow themselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit. That was the key commandment, and the rest would take care of itself.

Wives, Listen

As pointed out before that there is no verb in verse 22, the verb “submit” as often found in verse 22 in today’s various translations was inserted by translators borrowed from the previous verse. The two verses are closely tied to one another. It also implies that the injunction for wives to submit to their husbands was in the context of believers’ submitting to one another as they were filled with the Holy Spirit. A few things are worth noting here regarding the concept of “submission.”

First of all, the Greek word translated as “submit” or “submitting” in verse 21 is *hupotasso*. It is in middle voice meaning it is something one voluntarily does to oneself. Again, it is not a direct command but rather an expression of one being filled with the Holy Spirit. And it should be done “out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21), not because

of anyone's own merit, status or superiority. And since Ephesians 5:22 is borrowing the same word from the previous verse, the submission of the wife to the husband is also voluntary, not coerced. Remember in Paul's days, wives had to obey their husbands. That was a given. So Paul actually was saying something revolutionary. He was saying that whereas before wives did not have a choice but to obey their husbands, no matter what, now because of the new life they had found in Christ, the wives would be able to subject themselves voluntarily to their husbands "in everything" (Eph. 5:24) as they were filled by the Spirit. So the kind of submission mentioned here was more an all-time disposition, an attitude of respect and a willingness to yield to another's preference.

Regarding verse 23 where it says, "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior;" a whole theology of "headship" has sprung from it. People have a tendency to read the meaning of the word "head" in their own time and culture into the first century rather than the other way round. That can be a great error. Something in one culture may mean a very different thing in another.³⁰ Traditionally people infer from this passage that the husband is the head of the household and the spiritual leader of the family. But a closer look at the passage reveals that the passage may actually mean something else.

First of all, if Paul intended to say that the husband is the head of the wife and therefore has authority over the wife, he would probably use the Greek word *archon*, rather than the Greek word *kephale*.³¹ Second, in the Hebrew culture, it was the heart, not

³⁰ For example, the color red in the Chinese culture means luck, fortune, happiness; whereas in the United States, the color red is often used to indicate danger, caution, imminent threat. Also in Western culture, people wear black to attend a funeral whereas in the Eastern culture, immediate family members of the deceased often wear white in funerals.

³¹ Berkeley & Alvera Mickelsen, "What Does *Kephale* Mean in the New Testament?" in *Women, Authority & the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press), 110.

the head, that was the most prized as it says in Proverbs 4:23 “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” Third, when Paul used the metaphor here, he was pointing out that “the husband is the head of the wife *as* Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the *Savior*” (emphasis the author’s). He did not say “the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the *Ruler*, or *Leader*, or even *Master*. ” It was Christ’s sacrificial love to the point of giving up His own life to die for His people to save them that was being spoken here. Also, in John 7:38, Jesus said, “He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (Darby Bible). “By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive” (John 7:39). The Holy Spirit who guides believers into all truth flows from one’s belly or heart, not head. Now if “head” as used by Paul did not mean authority or leader, what did it mean? David Scholer, in his article “The Evangelical Debate over Biblical ‘Headship,’” gives a helpful summary as to how contemporary scholars look at the word “kephale.” Among other noted scholars, Gilbert Bilezikian, Catherine Clark Kroeger and Gordon D. Fee all argue extensively that kephale means “source,” or “source of life.”³² In *The Source New Testament*, 1 Corinthians 11:3 is simply translated as: “Now, I want you to know that the source of every man is the Anointed One, the source of woman is man, and the source of the Anointed One is God.”³³ In the footnote, translator A. Nyland writes,

Kephale, “source”, has been mistranslated as “head (over)” by most Bible versions....*Kephale* cannot mean “head over someone”...The subject matter is clearly source, for Paul talks about men coming from women and women from men (verses 8, 9 and 12).³⁴

³² David M. Scholer, “The Evangelical Debate over Biblical ‘Headship’” in *Women, Abuse and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 45.

³³ A. Nyland, *The Source New Testament* (Parramatta, N.S.W.: Smith and Stirling Publishing: 2004), 432.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 432-33.

Likewise, when it comes to Ephesians 5:23, *The Source New Testament's* translation is simply: "The man is the source of the woman just as the Anointed One is the source of the assembly. He himself is the protector of the body."

Now there is a third way to look at the metaphor that Paul used here: that the Greek word *kephale* means just that: the body part head. So when Paul said "the husband is the head of the wife," what he wanted to emphasize was the connectedness between the two. The husband was vital to the wife and the wife was vital to the husband. Neither one could not live without the other. What use is a head without a body and what use is a body without a head?³⁵ To use this metaphor to say that the husband is the head of the wife and therefore he is the leader, or the spiritual leader, not only of the wife, but also of the household, is indeed lacking solid support and biblical warrant.

Husbands, Listen

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body.

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (Ephesians 5:25-33)

As shown in the previous session, what Paul wrote in Ephesians 5 really revolutionized the way people look at marriage. Previously, wives were to obey their

³⁵ The author of this paper once had a very interesting dream in which the author saw a number of human heads lying on the ground. It was when the author woke up that she realized what the picture in the dream portrayed was so true, that no matter how one wants to elevate the importance of the head, a head without the body is not only useless but blatantly grotesque.

husbands with no choice. But then Paul exhorted the wives to submit themselves to their husbands voluntarily with an added spiritual dimension for they were doing that to their husbands as to the Lord. Whereas in the first century marriage was more for convenience than mutual commitment, Paul was using a head-body metaphor to portray the inseparable, intimate, one-flesh relationship between the husband and wife.

What about the husbands? Remember Paul was speaking to the husbands in a culture where the male of the species enjoyed all the privileges that a marriage could offer. And now Paul was turning to the husbands to ask them to *agapao* their wives. That is, to love their wives with the highest form of love possible, even the kind of love that Christ used to love the church. The husband was exhorted to love his wife unconditionally, sacrificially, and to provide for and care for his wife the way he cared for his own body. That was a real challenge. The husband at that time would see how much they had fallen short of God's standard. Again, it went back to Ephesians 5:18. The kind of love Paul was asking for was impossible without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. It was simply not of human nature to love like this and certainly not found among the husbands that Paul was addressing.

After exhorting how the wife and the husband should treat each other, Paul also showed that marriage was not just between two people. Paul was using the relationship between a husband and wife to portray the relationship between Christ and the church and that was a profound mystery. If a husband and a wife constantly remembered that their relationship was also to mirror that between Christ and His body, the church, how would that revolutionize their relationship?

Lessons Learned from the Ephesians 5 Passage:

When it says the husband is the head and the wife is the body, the emphasis is on the “one flesh” relationship of the two. It is an organic and mysterious union more than anything else. The point is that it takes the head and the body together to form a whole. The head cannot function without the body and the body cannot function without the head. They are interdependent of each other. It is not a matter of ranking or of who the boss is. It is the fusing of the spirit, soul and body of two people to make it one. It is beautiful and it is God-ordained.

A wife should take the initiative to submit always to her husband, putting her husband above herself. Likewise, a husband should always consider what is best for his wife and be willing to give up his own dreams and wishes in order for hers to come true. It is not leading and following. It is simultaneously considering the other as more important than himself/herself (cf. Phil. 2:3).

A man is to love his wife and a wife is to respect her husband (Eph. 5:33). But love and respect are not mutually exclusive. And there *are* good reasons why Paul would command the husband to love and the wife to respect.³⁶

There are other important passages on marriage such as: 1 Corinthians 13³⁷, Mark 12:31³⁸, John 15:13³⁹ and Philipians 2:1-5⁴⁰. Christian husband and wife are brother and

³⁶ Emerson Eggerichs has written a book titled *Love and Respect* (Brentwood, TN: Integrity, 2004) talking about why love and respect are so important to wives and husbands respectively and how husbands and wives should love and respect their spouses in very specific ways.

³⁷ The whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 13 talks about love. Verses 4 to 8 says, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails...” It is mandatory for husband and wife to exhibit this kind of love reciprocally in their marriage.

³⁸ Mark 12:31 says, “The second is this: ‘Love your neighbors as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” This second most important commandment applies to both the husband and the wife in the marital relationship.

sister in Christ first, spouse to one another second. Their call to be Jesus Christ's disciples comes before their call to be a sacrificial husband and a submissive wife. "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you" (Matt.6:33).

When two souls are melded together by love and commitment to become one flesh, there will no longer be the issue of who is first and who is last; who is to lead and who is to follow. The husband-wife relationship should be fluid and versatile, because after all, it is an organic bonding rather than an institutional binding.

Conclusion

Marriage as designed by God is meant to be a life-long one-flesh relationship shared by a man and a woman and marked by mutual love and respect. The oneness between the husband and wife is to mirror the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church. And God Himself is the One who models this in the first place.

Within the Godhead, the Father pours Himself into the Son. In turn, the Son gives Himself unreservedly to the Father. And the Spirit, as Mediator, pours their love from each to each. Within this Divine dance of love, there exists no hierarchy. There is only mutual fellowship, mutual love, and mutual subjection.⁴¹

Stated simply, the Trinitarian nature of God serves as both the source and the model for all human community. And it is within the love relationship of the Godhead that the principle of mutual subjection finds its true value.

³⁹ John 15:13 says, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." Husband and wife is friend to one another. Each should be ready and willing to die for the other.

⁴⁰ Philippians 2:1-5 says, "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." Again, this kind of love and unity and mutual respect should be present in a marital relationship.

⁴¹ Frank Viola, *Who is Your Covering?* (USA: Present Testimony Ministry), 84.

Mutual subjection, therefore, is not a human concept. It rather stems from the communal and reciprocal nature of the eternal God.⁴²

Likewise, marital oneness is not a human concept. It was designed by God for His beloved children, can only be realized through the power of the Holy Spirit, and will one day be perfected when Christ receives His Bride.

Marriage can be heaven or hell, depending on whether it is done God's way or man's way.

⁴² Ibid., 85-86..

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Books on marriage written by Christian and secular authors abound. The reason is obvious. Most people desire to have a happy marriage and almost everyone will inevitably come across some problems and need some help. Scores of books are available that give one skills and secrets as to how to win one's spouse's heart and how to bring the most satisfaction out of one's marriage. Yet often times the techniques offered are based on human wisdom, and may only be good at treating the symptoms without looking at the root cause. Marriage is much more than making two people feel good. And since God is the original creator of marriage, one cannot find the blueprint of marriage without going to the one who created it in the first place.

It is the researcher's intent to provide a recommendation of books for those who want to take a thorough look at what marriage is all about especially from a biblical perspective.

The Core

If someone is to pick just one book to read and wants to gain some insight into marriage, the researcher will undoubtedly recommend the book *Marriage Made in Eden* by Alice P. Mathews and M. Gay Hubbard (2004)⁴³. Both authors were in their seventies when they penned the book and as said in the book's preface, Mathews and Hubbard brought together nearly a century of firsthand experience of marriage. They are both social scientists by their training, seasoned workers with women for decades and are also

⁴³ Alice P. Mathews & M. Gay Hubbard, *Marriage Made in Eden* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004).

life-long serious students of the Word. The authors first pointed out the culture's case against marriage followed by God's case for marriage, carefully exposing some myths regarding marriage while boldly proposing that a biblical marriage should be both transformational and missional. In addition to giving the readers a thoroughly biblical perspective, the sociological insights brought into this book make it a unique contribution to the field and bring freshness to this familiar subject.

The three other books included in this "core category" are Bruce C. E. Fleming's *Familiar "Leadership" Heresies Uncovered* (2005)⁴⁴, Gilbert Bilezikian's *Beyond Sex Roles* (1985)⁴⁵ and Sarah Sumner's *Men and Women in the Church* (2003)⁴⁶. All three authors are noted theologians and college/seminary professors and the books mentioned directly dived into the passages relevant to the subject.

As the title suggests, Bruce Fleming's *Familiar "Leadership" Heresies Uncovered* goes directly after those passages that people use to develop all kinds of teaching that, according to the author, run contrary to Scripture. One will find interpretation for pivotal passages regarding marriage like Genesis 2-3 that comes as a result of groundbreaking research on the original Hebrew text. The author also took a close look at concepts like "leadership," "headship" and "authority" from other New Testament passages and succinctly pointed out how people have erred in their using the passages to support a hierarchical position and uncovered various "heresies" like peeling an onion one layer after the other. In the final chapter the author also provided four

⁴⁴ Bruce C. E. Fleming, *Familiar "Leadership" Heresies Uncovered* (Eugene: Resource Publications, 2005).

⁴⁵ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985).

⁴⁶ Sarah Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

principles and seven Bible study steps to help readers spot heresies for themselves, a very practical and needed help indeed.

Now if one is looking for a comprehensive treatment of gender issues or more exactly, as the subtitle of the book suggests, what the Bible says about a woman's place in church and family, Gilbert Bilezikian's *Beyond Sex Roles* is no doubt the choice. Arguing from a strong egalitarian position, Bilezikian walks through the Bible from A to Z to show with a creation-fall-redemption framework why the Bible teaches mutual submission rather than hierarchy, whether in the church or family. It is extremely helpful for those who come from a traditional or complementarian background. His book is a direct rebuttal to James B. Hurley's *Men and Women in Biblical Perspective* (1981), one of the most representative works that argues for a hierarchical position in general.

Sarah Sumner's book *Men and Women in the Church* introduces a theology of women woven into the narrative of the author's own story. A fine theologian, Christian writer, seminary professor, preacher and leader in her local church, Sarah Sumner brings a fresh breeze into the often male-dominated theological arena. She writes with distinct scholarship, theological insights and rare originality sprinkled with a unique personal touch. Sumner declares herself neither as a complementarian nor as an egalitarian. Her identity is simply a follower of Christ. To her, "Christians don't have to be feminists in order to believe in social justice. Feminism is not something that must be added to Christianity in order for the church to honor women. The gospel itself is pro-women."⁴⁷

Unlike Bilezikian who takes a clear stand on egalitarianism, Sumner is trying to build a consensus on Christian leadership as the subtitle of her book says. She has a way

⁴⁷ Ibid., 28.

of saying things to make her point without offending anyone yet, in a sense, confronts all.⁴⁸

The researcher finds Sumner's interpretation on Ephesians 5 regarding the marriage metaphor particularly helpful. Her insight in seeing the head-body, sacrifice-submit, and love-respect couplets⁴⁹ may well be some kind of "revelation" to many. Readers will find Sumner's book an insightful and interesting read and be impressed by the author's honesty and sense of humor.

It is worth mentioning that the ways in which Fleming, Bilezikian and Sumner interpret "head" in Corinthians 11 differ greatly, though none of them supports a hierarchical position. Perhaps they all discover a piece to the puzzle and in the end, it really takes a community to find the truth.

The Reference

Whereas the first category of books given is meant to be read from cover to cover, this second category of books serves well in providing anthologies on the subject of

⁴⁸ Here are some examples of quotes from Sarah Sumner's book *Men and Women in the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003):

Augustine's theory...says a father is born as the image of God and a mother *becomes* the image of God during the act of consummation...If we apply Augustine's theory, Jesus was conceived in the womb of a single, unwed woman who had not yet become the image of God. (67)

...overall, I didn't want to be associated with women whom evangelical Christians don't embrace. That was my sin: I wanted to be trusted and respected by the conservative Christian community more than I wanted to serve Christ. (72)

Prejudice is a sin of omission. It derives from the failure of love...the worst kind of prejudice is religious prejudice that deems itself as sanctioned by God. When someone believes God sees one category of people as superior or inferior to another, then prejudice becomes blind not only to itself but also to the sinfulness of itself. (76-77)

Men are afraid, women are afraid. Men feel overly pressured to be perfect, and women feel overly pressured to hold back. Consequently both choke under the pressure of their fears. (104)

⁴⁹ Ibid., 162

woman, man and gender issues. In 1991, noted pastor John Piper and theologian Wayne Grudem compiled the book *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*⁵⁰ as a response to evangelical feminism. In this volume of over five hundred pages, twenty-two men and women, mostly seminary professors and Bible scholars, joined arms to produce this thorough response to evangelical feminism dealing with all the main passages relevant to this debate. The book serves as a great reference to look at the complementarian argument, the rationale behind women's limited roles in the church and also the women's place at home and in the marital relationship.

Thirteen years later, in 2004, seminary professor Ronald W. Pierce and author Rebecca Merrill Groothuis compiled another volume, also over five hundred pages, called *Discovering Biblical Equality—Complementarity without Hierarchy*.⁵¹ Although not explicitly expressed as such, it is obvious that the book is a *response* to the response to evangelical feminism, that is, Piper and Grudem's anthology. Again, the book is a joined effort of twenty-six evangelical scholars looking at the various passages regarding gender issues in the Bible. It also provides practical applications at the end and how biblical equality should play out in the church and the family. Whether one is a complementarian, egalitarian, or somewhere in between, these two books give the readers a good handle on the subject. Since virtually the whole church is affected by the subject, it is wise to look at both books to understand how two groups of scholars who hold an "inerrant" view of the Scripture can come to such diverse interpretations and conclusions.

⁵⁰ John Piper and Wayne A. Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood(RBMW): A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991).

⁵¹ Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, general editors, *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004).

The last book in this “reference category” is Katharine C. Bushnell’s *God’s Word to Women*.⁵² Katherine C. Bushnell was a medical doctor, a brilliant scholar who studied the Bible in its original languages and also a courageous advocate for the oppressed. She was a woman ahead of her time and was a committed egalitarian even before the term existed. Her book contains one hundred Bible studies on woman’s place in the church and home. The book was first published in 1921 and she was one of the few who first observed correlations between the suppression of women and the misinterpretations of Scripture. The value of the book far exceeds its price.⁵³

The Target

The next category of books shares two things in common: the books are all written by female authors and they are all directly or indirectly supporting a marriage that is built on the principle of mutuality rather than hierarchy.

The first book in this category is Patricia Gundry’s *Heirs Together: Applying the Bible Principles of Mutual Submission in Your Marriage* (1980).⁵⁴ This is one of the very first books written that speaks for an equal marriage with a Christian perspective and places absolute authority on the Bible. Gundry pointed out up front that marriage is a relation, not just an institution. Christians should not be so preoccupied with a structure for marriage that they forget the living relationship within it. She pointed out that since people nowadays live in an era of depersonalization, they are starving for personal meaning and expression and that tends to cause people to put an emotional overload on

⁵² Katherine C. Bushnell, *God’s Word to Women* (Minneapolis: CBE, 2003).

⁵³ As a matter of fact, three women from Texas have developed a website bearing the same name <http://godstowomen.org>. The website not only highly recommends this book but also provides vast resources to help women in their search to discover who God says they are.

⁵⁴ Patricia Gundy, *Heirs Together* (Grand Rapids: Suitcase Books, 1980).

their marriages and expect the relationship to make up the deficit. Gundry showed some of the historical influences that formed the traditional marriage roles widely accepted by Christians today. She also gave some hermeneutical principles, presented some first-century marriage customs and helped readers realize the secular and private nature of marriage. These all laid the ground work before she stated the principle of mutual submission and went into the relevant passages in greater detail. Gundry decoded the myth on the concept of “headship” and “submission” with a common-sense approach yet not without adequate scholarship. The author’s personality and originality shine throughout the book. This book was selected by *Eternity Magazine* as one of the top twenty-five books of the year.

Towards the end of book, Gundry included a Questions and Answers session to answer some practical questions in applying the principles of mutual submission. The response of Gundry’s husband to the question as how he thinks about equal marriage is very revealing. In his own words, “Living as equals has given me back the woman I was originally attracted to. It has brought us back to the basis for the relationship that *we* originally had.”⁵⁵

Overall, *Heirs Together* is straightforward, easy to read and concise. It gives the readers the feeling that mutual submission in marriage really works. Her central message is that both husband and wife need to be able to live out who they really are, and to synergize when coming together rather than taking away from one another. An equal marriage is to enrich and enhance rather than to deplete and diminish both lives. God created marriage so that both Adam and Eve would be completed, not to force them into

⁵⁵ Ibid., 168.

a mode with limited mobility. God created humans to share with Him and with one another. And indeed husband and wife are heirs together of the gracious gift of life (c. 1 Pet. 3:7).

Patricia Gundry also has a website⁵⁶ that provides a lot of helpful resources on the subject and in fact, the entire text of the book *Heirs Together* can be read on the website.

The second book in this category is Ruth A. Tucker's *Women in the Maze* (1992).⁵⁷ The entire book is presented in a Question and Answer format. Each of the thirty chapters is titled in form of a question and contains several questions along the same line. Examples are: "Is God Masculine?", "Does the Creation Account Support Male Headship?", "What Is the Significance of the 'Curse' on Adam and Eve?", "Did the Apostles Affirm Male Headship and Wifely Submission?", etc. It deals with a lot of common questions regarding the male and female gender beginning with the story of the Creation and the Fall and addresses the issues right to the point. It is easy to read and as the subtitle suggests, it poses the questions and provides the answers on biblical equality. This is a good starter for those who are interested in the subject and often are exposed to only one side of the debate.⁵⁸

The last book in this category is *Equal to the Task* (1998)⁵⁹ by Ruth Haley Barton. In it she discusses men and women in partnership at work, at church and at home. This book argues that men and women should move beyond stereotypes and become one true community to serve God together rather than creating man-made barriers to segregate and

⁵⁶ Go to: <http://patriciagundry.com>.

⁵⁷ Ruth A. Tucker, *Women in the Maze* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

⁵⁸ Ruth Tucker is also the coauthor of another valuable volume, *Daughters of the Church*, with Walter Liefeld (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987). *Daughters of the Church* is a 552-page book that takes a rather comprehensive look at women and ministry from New Testament times to the present.

⁵⁹ Ruth Haley Barton, *Equal to the Task* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998).

limit both genders. The chapter on “Mutually Empowering Marriage” is particularly useful to the subject matter at hand. It depicts the story of Greg and Julie and gives a vivid description of what a vast number of sincere, well meaning evangelicals may have experienced in their own marital lives.⁶⁰ The essential message of the book is:

God’s original and best plan for the marriage relationship was a partnership model in which a man and a woman function together as a team of equals... This male-female team was not characterized by hierarchy or top-down authority structures but by an equal sharing of power, strength and helpfulness to the task at hand... Any configuration for marriage in which one partner or the other is prevented from being involved in each of these creation mandates robs that individual of the full human experience for which he or she was created.⁶¹

The Other Side of the Issue

The last category of books has to do with domestic violence. One may ask what domestic violence has to do with marital oneness, or complementarity without hierarchy? The answer is: a lot! One may not easily see the connection between a hierarchical marriage and domestic violence. Yet reality and statistics reveal that a lot of domestic abuse is going on in Christian homes. The first book on the subject the researcher recommends is *Battered Into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home* (1989) by James Alsdurf and Phyllis Alsdurf.⁶² The authors cited their findings from extensive research and interviews with victims, abusers and pastors to provide a comprehensive treatment of this disturbing subject. The authors also showed how the distribution of power is badly skewed in the Christian home:

⁶⁰ The point the Barton tries to illustrate here is that when a marriage assumes male headship is a biblical truth and lets that play out in life, the danger is that the wife may eventually surrender her personality in the process, and will have less to give to the relationship as years pass. Powerful feelings of hostility may well up inside her and she may have the feeling of being “trapped” in the marriage which is neither healthy nor holy.

⁶¹ Ruth Haley Barton, *Equal to the Task* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 160.

⁶² James Alsdurf and Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered Into Submission* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989).

Fortified by preaching that accepts all sorts of cultural assumptions about what “headship” means, abusers often use Scripture as ammunition for their misuse of power. One battered wife noted, “... the hierarchy of marriage... can be fuel to flames of dominance and even violence. Wives of such men, obedient to their misconception of submission, often reinforce their husbands’ violent or antisocial behavior.”⁶³

Once one can see how the Scripture can be misused and abused to justify abuse, one may well look at the marital dynamic in a whole new light.

The last two books reviewed here are both edited by Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck. They are collections of essays dealing with the theological, theoretical and practical issues regarding domestic abuse. They are called *Women, Abuse, and the Bible* (1996)⁶⁴ and *Healing the Hurting* (1998)⁶⁵ respectively.

As the title suggests, *Women, Abuse, and the Bible* delineates how these entities are related: women, abuse and the Bible. Penned by a variety of authors from various fields, the book reveals how some long-held religious beliefs have no biblical ground at all but are actually doing much harm to the Christian body. One of the authors says,

Teachings that cause women to doubt their own intrinsic preciousness and equal worth with men, that cause them to mistrust their own ability to make moral judgments, or that make them vulnerable to violence and abuse even within their most intimate relationships and homes are surely a blasphemous misrepresentation of Jesus’ intentions for us.⁶⁶

This book has done tremendous good to help the Christian body see the fact that certain erroneous teaching can really turn the gospel upside down; or that, in the authors’ words: the Scripture can be used to hurt or heal.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 17.

⁶⁴ Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck, *Women, Abuse, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

⁶⁵ Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck, *Healing the Hurting* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).

⁶⁶ Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck, *Women, Abuse, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 27.

The last book to be reviewed in this chapter is a sequel to the previous book: *Healing the Hurting*. Here the editorial team compiled another set of essays to challenge the thinking that uses Scripture to justify abuse, and then to offer practical helps to those who are victims of abuse. The final plea of the authors of the book is that the church needs to be a healing environment for the hurting and the congregation needs to be adequately educated regarding the issue.

The practice of using Scripture to justify abuse, whether overtly or subtly, is a phenomenon that needs to be put to an end. Yet the general body of Christ needs to have this kind of awareness. When the awareness becomes a conviction it will then force the conscience to do something. Kroeger and Beck have done a great service to the Church by exposing the fact of domestic abuse happening in the Christian home and the harm that hierarchicalism can do to a family and the society. As one author in the book says, “hierarchicalism is an inherently evil, counterfeit structure that is superimposed on God’s good plan for the structures of society that govern his good creation.”⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck, *Healing the Hurting* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Books, 1998), 196.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH PROCESS

The primary context of ministry of this researcher is among overseas-born Chinese in North America. Currently there are very few, if any, books in Chinese that teach an egalitarian marriage with a Christian, biblical perspective. Most of the Chinese Christians the researcher encounters in North America are first-generation evangelical Christians who receive their Bible teaching from pastors and Sunday school teachers trained in conservative, evangelical seminaries in North America. Education in the Chinese culture has had a long history of being a passive reception of information. Obedience to the teacher without question was considered a virtue. Students were spoon-fed with knowledge rather than encouraged to think critically for themselves. The tremendous emphasis placed on public examination which required students to find the right answer in multiple-choice questions had conditioned students to go after conformity rather than creativity and critical thinking. Such educational patterns and mindsets have been naturally transferred to the church, where most Christians receive what they hear from the pulpit without much questioning. In light of this ministry context, the objective of the research was to find out:

- What Chinese Christians believe the Bible teaches about gender roles in marriage in general.
- How Chinese Christian couples are practicing what they believe the Bible teaches about gender roles in marriage in real life.

- Whether there are Chinese Christians who question the traditional teaching on marriage or struggle in a traditional marriage.
- Whether Chinese Christians have studied critically key passages regarding marital roles in the Bible themselves.
- Whether Chinese Christians are open to an alternative view regarding marriage versus the traditional view.
- The most effective ways to help the Chinese people to come to their own conclusion regarding what God's design is for marriage.

I. The Questionnaire

The researcher first developed a questionnaire on marital dynamics (see Appendix A). The original plan was to ask the seven couples who belonged to the researcher's small group to do the same questionnaire before and after studies on critical passages regarding marital dynamics from the Bible. These couples have been meeting regularly for the past two years for mutual support and edification. They knew one another well and felt comfortable to share intimate things in their lives. Although they are all Chinese, they came from a number of different countries such as: Hong Kong, Malaysia, Vietnam and mainland China. It is worth noting that Hong Kong is one of the most women-friendly cities in the whole world. Egalitarian marriage is simply a norm in general both in and outside the church. In most families, both the husband and wife work outside the house. The affordability of hiring a full-time housekeeper or nanny creates ample freedom and opportunity for women with young children to have uninterrupted career lives. Women in Malaysia and Vietnam are also catching up whether in developing their own career or in receiving higher education. Regarding China, ever since Chairman Mao

once said that women should hold up half of the sky, the status of women in China changed overnight. Women were no longer kept at home but were encouraged to receive education, to work and to raise the family side by side with their husbands. In fact, the restriction of women from full-participation in church life has been a reason that has kept some Chinese women from accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. The seven couples involved represented four countries of origin.

II. The Group Discussion

After the pre-test questionnaire was completed, the researcher found from the responses to the questionnaire that answers to the questions were often conflicting with one another, meaning the participants did not have a good grasp of what the questions were asking. The researcher also found that certain beliefs regarding marriage were deeply ingrained in the participants' mind and it would be unrealistic to expect to see much change in their answers to the same questionnaire after participating in a couple sessions of Bible studies.

The researcher thus found that it was more important to create an opportunity and a relaxed atmosphere for the participants to share their views of marriage freely and how their marriages worked in real life. The researcher thus prepared a list of questions (see Appendix B) for open discussion among the participants. It was communicated clearly in the discussion session that no one's answers would be judged and transparency and honesty were encouraged throughout the discussion. Since the Chinese generally believed it was important to maintain harmony in relationship with one other, confrontation was often avoided if possible. This was also why controversial subjects were seldom put on the table because people would feel rejected when their views were not well received.

The discussion the researcher conducted went well. Since it took place in one of the participants' family room, participants generally felt at ease and comfortable to share freely what they thought and believed and what their real-life interaction with their spouse was like. The discussion served as a great ice breaker. Everybody showed interest and enthusiasm in the subject discussed, especially when they knew that the discussion was needed as part of a research process. No one was on guard or defensive. It also paved the way for the next two Bible studies which would be more serious and intense.

III. Study on Genesis 1-3

For the Bible study on selected passages from Genesis 1-3 (see Appendix C), the original couples from the researcher's small group could not attend because there was a snow storm on the day of meeting and driving was dangerous. The researcher thus invited Chinese Christian neighbors who lived in the same community to participate in the Bible study. Altogether there were four couples participating in the study. Three couples were from Hong Kong. For the fourth couple, the husband came from mainland China while the wife came from Taiwan. Since this was a last-minute invitation and the couples really did not know what to expect, the opening of the study was a little awkward. Participants did not have time to "warm-up" and also did not have the rapport like the previous group; some of the participants were pretty silent at first. In the beginning, when the researcher shared an alternative interpretation for some of the passages which were unheard of by most church-goers, some participants reacted strongly. They simply were not ready or prepared to look at the passage differently and felt like the researcher was making something up to make a point. However, there were also participants who echoed to the researcher's observation and felt enlightened by the researcher's insight.

IV. Study on Ephesians 5:18-33

The final group session was a Bible study on Ephesians 5:18-33 (see Appendix D) that took place in the researcher's family room. The original couples were present and they were both prepared and ready to go to the passage. Since these couples all knew one another well and had already gone through the questionnaire and the discussion questions, they knew what to expect and the atmosphere was good. These couples were also younger in age compared to the last group. The majority in this group came from Hong Kong and were very receptive to the new insights brought up by the researcher regarding the Ephesians passage. An overwhelming response after the study was that Paul was not a male chauvinist after all.

Summary

The questionnaire, the discussion questions, and the Bible study materials on Genesis 1-3 and Ephesians 5:18-33 were all great tools to be used to whet people's appetite to seek after God's blueprint for marriage. Those who participated in the process not only learned more about the Word but also discovered more about themselves, their spouses and God's heart regarding marriage.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH OUTCOMES

The research project consisted of a questionnaire, a group discussion and two small group Bible studies. As mentioned in chapter four, the subjects involved in the research were overseas-born Chinese living in North America. The countries of origin included Hong Kong, mainland China, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam.

Result from Questionnaire (see Appendix A):

A total of twelve people participated in filling out the questionnaire. They were all in their 30s and 40s. All were professing Christians with different church affiliations. When asked to describe their marital life, most of them were either extremely satisfied or somewhat satisfied with it.

Whereas all participants believed that there is no inherent superiority of one gender over the other, three participants (two were men) believed that God has authority over the husband, and the husband has authority over the wife. In other words, whereas they believed the husband is not superior to his wife, he does have authority over his wife or there is a hierarchy between the husband and the wife.

In response to whether women are more easily deceived than men, whereas no one totally agreed, about one third partially agreed, one third indicated neutral and another one third totally disagreed.

Response to the statement that there are different and specific roles for men and women was overwhelmingly affirmative. Seven participants totally agreed while five

partially agreed. In response to whether the woman being created as “helper” in Genesis implied subordination, the result was evenly spread in all the responses. A majority of participants believed the husband is the spiritual leader of his wife. And again, regarding whether the husband should have the final word regarding family decisions, the responses were evenly distributed.

Regarding whether “to submit to your husband as to the Lord” means a wife needs to obey her husband in all situations, about half partially agreed while the other half totally disagreed. Regarding whether “to love your wife as your own body” means the husband should always put the interest of his wife before his, most of the participants agreed. When asked if mutual submission does not apply in the marital relationship, most participants disagreed. A majority of participants disagreed with the statement that the best way to preserve family harmony is for the husband to have absolute authority over the wife and the children; a majority also believed that regarding important household decisions, the husband and wife need to reach a consensus before moving on. Most participants disagreed that domestic violence is largely a result of wives not submitting to their husbands and also disagreed that wife abuse is largely a result of blind submissiveness toward an abusive husband.

Finally, when asked what “the husband is the head of the wife” primarily means, the top three choices were: the husband and the wife are intimately connected; the husband is the wife’s provider and protector and the husband is the wife’s spiritual leader. When asked what one is looking for in marriage in general, the top three choices were: emotional connection; spiritual compatibility; and a tied-third: companionship and fulfilling life mission together.

The result of the questionnaire showed that the participants agreed to the following in general:

- that there is no inherent superiority of one gender over the other.
- that there are different and specific roles for men and women.
- that the husband is to be the spiritual leader of the wife.
- that “to love your wife as your own body” means the husband should always put the interest of his wife before his own.
- that regarding important household decisions, the husband and wife need to reach a consensus before moving on.

It also showed that participants differ significantly in their response to whether the husband should be the final decision maker, whether “helper” means subordination and whether “to submit to your husband” means obedience. When asked what the metaphor of “the husband is the head of the wife” means, the number one choice was that it means the husband and the wife are intimately connected, and when the participants were asked what they are looking for the most in marriage, the number one choice was emotional connection.

The result of the questionnaire showed some inconsistency in the participants’ responses. For example, whereas no participants disagreed that regarding important household decisions, the husband and wife need to reach a consensus before moving on, four participants indicated that they agreed or partially agreed that a husband always has the final word regarding all family decisions. Also, from the significantly different responses to what “to submit to your husband” means and whether “helper” implies

subordination, it was seen that the same passage could mean different things to those who proclaimed to be Bible-believing Christians.

Observations from Group Discussion to Explore the Contemporary Man and Woman's View on Marriage (see Appendix B):

The subjects who participated in the small group discussion were the same ones who filled out the questionnaire. The discussion served as a great ice breaker. It provided an opportunity for people to share freely their thoughts regarding husband-wife relationship in a non-threatening atmosphere. The purpose of the discussion was not to provide new information or to teach any “truths,” it was rather for the leader to listen to what the participants had to say and to understand where they came from. Hence during the discussion time, both husbands and wives were encouraged to share freely. There was no correction of views, no judgment was made. Rather, the discussion was to serve as an appetizer to whet the people's appetite to take a closer look at the Scripture in future sessions. It was also used to raise the awareness towards gender issues that were often assumed without being thought through in the Chinese church culture.

The following observations were made during the actual discussion:

- Most participants simply accepted what they had been taught in Sunday school or Sunday sermon passively without questioning the validity of what was being taught.
- Most participants believed the Bible taught certain things and realized they were not practicing what the Bible taught, yet they did not see the need to bridge the gap between what they believed the Bible taught and what they practiced in real life.

- Some people admitted thinking God being unfair at times and felt helpless to do anything about it.
- Most participants showed interest in the questions and were actively participating in the discussion.

Once again, the leader needed to remember the purpose of the discussion and be careful not to pass judgment on differing views and not to give a lecture but to listen and encourage more open discussion. This could serve as a great groundwork to prepare people to get into the Word to study in greater depth what the Bible had to say about marital relationships.

Observations from Bible Study on Genesis 1-3 and Ephesians 5:18-33 (see Appendix C & D)

Four couples attended the Bible study on Genesis 1-3 at a last-minute notice as the original group could not come as there was a snow storm on the day of the meeting. The new participants were the researcher's neighbors. They were all professing Christians who came from Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China. Their ages ranged from early 30s to late 40s. They were more mature Christians compared to the original group. For the Bible study on Ephesians 5, the original group came and there were six couples participating in the study.

Whereas both studies generated a lot of interesting discussion and revealing comments, they also showed that participants were either not familiar with the passages or they had already assumed a lot of what they heard about the passages to be true without critical examination at the passages themselves. They often misquoted the Bible or read into the Bible what was not there and cited their beliefs as typically taught by

conservative evangelicals. When the researcher suggested some alternative ways to interpret the passages or brought in what particular words meant in the original language, reactions varied. To those who were more open-minded and less “churched,” their reaction was very positive. The alternative way of interpretation brought more freedom to some participants as they had wrestled with the passage. For those who had been in a traditional church for a number of years, their reaction to the alternative way of interpretation was rather skeptical. Some felt offended and extremely uncomfortable because their long-held beliefs were being challenged. There were those whose view would not change a bit after the Bible studies. Since an alternative way to look at marriage without the hierarchy was a major paradigm shift to some, it was not expected that a change of view would come easily or quickly.

Overall, the two Bible studies were stimulating and well received. Although there were some heated discussions here and there, the tension was good because it meant people were engaged.

The researcher learned a few things as a result of the two Bible studies. First of all, the one who was leading the study needed to be sensitive to where the participants came from. For example, there was one participant who firmly believed her husband was the head of the house, period! Even though the Bible never said the husband was the head of the house, but that the husband was the head of the wife (c.f. Eph. 5: 23), it absolutely made no difference to that participant. And to that participant, the “head” meant the husband was the decision maker, the spiritual leader and the authority of the whole household. When the researcher tried to explain “the head” in that passage might not mean what “the head” meant today, the participant simply could not hear that. It reflected

how ingrained certain concepts were in people's minds, that those were sacred beliefs to them and were unalterable. Whereas one might be familiar with a lot of arguments for a traditional/hierarchical marriage and found those unconvincing, one could not assume that other people were also exposed to those alternative views and thus needed to handle the conversation with much care.

It was also important for the Bible study leader not to go into argument with the participants or to become defensive when being challenged. The job of the Bible study leader was to provide needed objective information to help the participants to discover for themselves what the original intent of the biblical author was, and to allow the Bible passages to unfold and speak for themselves. Whether the participants could discover the truths for themselves also depended on their readiness and openness. In order to have an effective Bible study on these particular passages, the leader needed to stay objective the whole time. A leader should ask more questions to help the participants see what the passages say rather than give his/her interpretation and conclusion without allowing the participants to be part of the process of arriving to the conclusion.

The researcher found that it was helpful to take notes of what the participants shared during the Bible study. There were insights shared by the participants that were unique and inspiring. The researcher also found that one of the most effective ways to approach such a controversial subject was to use literature. There is a great need to provide Chinese literature that teaches egalitarian marriage with a Christian, biblical perspective. The use of literature is effective because it gives time for the reader to ponder, to think and to reflect. It also avoids direct confrontation with those who hold a different view. This might work really well for the Chinese Christians who do not like

confrontation in general. Teaching on egalitarian marriage can be presented in the form of a booklet as a follow-up study for participants who are interested in knowing more about an alternative view of what a Christian marriage should be like.

Conclusion

The questionnaire, the discussion and the two Bible studies served as great tools to raise people's awareness about gender roles in Christian marriage. They also gave people an opportunity to know that an alternative view different from the traditional view regarding marriage did exist. Education is vastly needed in this area. The tools were great to whet people's appetite on the subject. They also served to stimulate interest and create an opportunity for couples and individuals to engage in a healthy dialogue and gain biblical insights into critical passages regarding the subject.

As mentioned above, after conducting the questionnaire, guided discussion and the Bible studies, the researcher found that one of the most effective ways to help people to take an alternative look at marriage dynamic, or to consider a biblical model of marriage other than the hierarchical model, is to present this in the form of a booklet. For those who want to learn more about this alternative marriage model, they can simply read and re-read the material themselves and have time to digest the material and come to their own conclusion. A 35-page material titled *Hosting Heaven at Home: A Non-Traditional Look at Christian Marriage* is therefore provided by the researcher as part of this project (see Appendix E). There is a great need to translate this booklet into Chinese as there is so little Chinese literature available that teaches an egalitarian marriage with a Christian, biblical perspective. The booklet contains fifteen questions that challenge the traditional view on marriage and also provides an alternative view on what God's original intent for

marriage is like. It can be used as a great follow-up tool for those who have gone through the questionnaire, the discussion, the Bible studies and want to take a deeper look at the subject themselves. The booklet can also be read on its own, for who would not want to turn his or her home into a haven and heaven?

APPENDIX A

A Questionnaire on Marital Dynamics

Please check the most appropriate response:

1. What is your gender?

Male _____ Female _____

2. What is your age group?

21-35 _____ 36-50 _____ 51- 65 _____ over 65 _____

3. How would you describe yourself?

Atheist _____

Buddhist _____

Christian _____

Muslim _____

Other _____

4. What is your marital status?

Married _____

Divorced _____

Remarried _____

Widowed _____

Single _____

5. How would you describe your overall marital life (regarding current marriage life for those who are married and remarried, and regarding previous marriage for those who are divorced and widowed)?

Extremely satisfied _____

Somewhat satisfied _____

Neutral _____

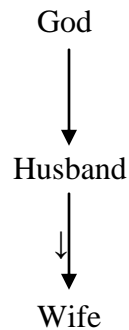
Somewhat dissatisfied _____

Extremely dissatisfied _____

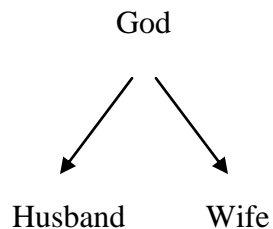
Not applicable _____

6. In your opinion, which model below reflects more accurately what a biblical marriage should be like?

A. God has authority over the husband over the wife.



B. God has authority over both the husband and the wife; and the husband and wife have equal authority over each other.



- A. _____
B. _____
C. I don't know _____

7. Please check the statement that you agree with the most:

- A. Men are inherently superior to women _____
B. Women are inherently superior to men _____
C. There is no inherent superiority of one gender over the other _____
D. Men are superior to women only after the Fall _____
E. Women are superior to men only after the Fall _____

8. Women are more easily deceived than men.

- Totally Agree _____
Partially Agree _____
Neutral _____
Partially Disagree _____
Totally Disagree _____

9. There are different and specific roles for men and women.

Totally Agree _____
Partially Agree _____
Neutral _____
Partially Disagree _____
Totally Disagree _____

10. In the book of Genesis, the fact that woman was created as “helper” means she is to be subordinate helper to her husband.

Totally Agree _____
Partially Agree _____
Neutral _____
Partially Disagree _____
Totally Disagree _____

11. The husband is the spiritual leader of his wife.

Totally Agree _____
Partially Agree _____
Neutral _____
Partially Disagree _____
Totally Disagree _____

12. A husband always has the final word regarding all family decisions.

Totally Agree _____
Partially Agree _____
Neutral _____
Partially Disagree _____
Totally Disagree _____

13. “To submit to your husband as to the Lord” means a wife needs to obey her husband in all situations.

Totally Agree _____
Partially Agree _____
Neutral _____
Partially Disagree _____
Totally Disagree _____

14. “To love your wife as your own body” means the husband should always put the interest of his wife before his.

Totally Agree _____
Partially Agree _____
Neutral _____
Partially Disagree _____
Totally Disagree _____

15. "Submit to one another out of reverence of Christ" (Ephesians 5:21) does not apply in a husband-wife relationship.
- Totally Agree _____
- Partially Agree _____
- Neutral _____
- Partially Disagree _____
- Totally Disagree _____
16. The best way to preserve family harmony is for the husband to have absolute authority over the wife and the children.
- Totally Agree _____
- Partially Agree _____
- Neutral _____
- Partially Disagree _____
- Totally Disagree _____
17. Regarding important household decisions, the husband and wife need to reach a consensus before moving on.
- Totally Agree _____
- Partially Agree _____
- Neutral _____
- Partially Disagree _____
- Totally Disagree _____
18. That "the husband is the head of the wife" primarily means (please rate those that apply, i.e. "1" being most appropriate and so on)
- A. the husband is the wife's boss _____
- B. the husband is the wife's spiritual leader _____
- C. the husband is the wife's provider and protector _____
- D. the husband is the wife's source _____
- E. the husband and the wife are intimately connected _____
- F. the husband and the wife cannot survive or function without each other _____
19. What are you looking for in marriage in general (please rate the importance, "1" being most important and so on.)
- A. spiritual compatibility _____
- B. emotional connection _____
- C. sexual intimacy _____
- D. financial security _____
- E. companionship _____
- F. fulfill life mission together _____
- G. helps each other actualize _____
- H. other _____

20. Domestic violence is largely a result of wives not submitting to their husbands.

Totally Agree _____
Partially Agree _____
Neutral _____
Partially Disagree _____
Totally Disagree _____

21. Wife abuse is largely a result of blind submissiveness toward an abusive husband.

Totally Agree _____
Partially Agree _____
Neutral _____
Partially Disagree _____
Totally Disagree _____

APPENDIX B

Exploring the Contemporary Man and Woman's View on Marriage⁶⁸

The following questions are used for small group discussion. Participants (couples and individuals) are encouraged to share freely their views regarding the questions posted.

1. What do you believe the Bible teaches about the roles of men and women in Christian marriage?
2. As you think about our beliefs about Christian marriage, where or how did you arrive at these beliefs? Please include in your description any books, seminars, classes, or individuals that played a key role in helping you form your beliefs about Christian marriage.
3. Have you at any time personally struggled with any of these beliefs in the context of your own experience of marriage? If so, which beliefs were difficult for you to harmonize with your own experience? How did you resolve the tension?
4. What do you believe the Bible teaches about gender roles in decision making in a Christian marriage?
5. How have you and your spouse handled decision making in your marriage?
6. How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the way you and your spouse handle decision making in your marriage?
7. What do you believe the Bible teaches about who should earn and who should spend money in a marriage?
8. If you experienced times of frustration or difficulty in your marriage, where have you turned for moral support or helpful advice?
9. In what ways has your church been a resource for you in times of need?
10. What kinds of support would you have liked but did not find available to you?
11. What do you believe are the most important ingredients in a happy marriage?
12. Which, if any, of these ingredients do you think may be different for men or women? Why would this be true?
13. What are the personal sacrifices a person ought to expect to make when entering into marriage?
14. Are these sacrifices different for men and women? If so, in what ways?

⁶⁸ These questions are taken selectively from "Appendix A: Survey Questions" designed by Alice Mathews in her book *Marriage Made in Eden* coauthored with M. Gay Hubbard (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004).

APPENDIX C

Revisiting the Garden: A Selective Study on Genesis 1-3

Introduction:

Genesis 1-3 records the story of Creation and the Fall followed by the Bad News and the Good. It also portrays some marital dynamics of the very first human couple and gives us insight into the purpose of marriage as God designed and the problem of marriage after sin entered the world. Selected verses will be looked at in this study to give the participants an overview of what happened in the beginning of history and the impact it had on all humankind after the drama that took place in the Garden.

The Creation:

Read Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7, 18-25

1:26

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Note: the word "man" is *adam* in Hebrew. When *adam* is used with the article it becomes a common noun meaning mankind or human being. When *adam* is used without the article it becomes a proper noun denoting a particular person. Note also that it says "let them rule over the fish..."

1:27

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Note: Again the word "man" here is the Hebrew word *adam*.

Questions:

- From Genesis 1:26 and 27, what do you learn about the creation of mankind?
- What has God given mankind in the very beginning?
- Do you see any differentiation in the nature of commissioning to the male and female at this point?
- Since God is Spirit, what does "God created man in His own image" mean? Could that be meaning a physical image and likeness?

1:28

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Note: The word “subdue” is *kabash* in Hebrew implies that it requires main strength to conquer the earth. Something hostile may already be in place at that point.

Questions:

- In Gen. 1:28, what are the added commands from God to the human beings He has created as compared to Gen. 1:26?
- Can the created beings be able to carry out God’s mandates for them alone? Why?

2:7

The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Note: The word used here is “formed” rather than “created.” Whereas in Genesis 1:27 it says “male and female he created them,” it can be inferred that whereas God created the man and the woman simultaneously, the man was formed, or fashioned, or elaborated first. Also, here the specific man (“the man”) is mentioned, not just mankind as in the previous chapter.

2:18-25

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame.

Note: In 2:18, “helper suitable” are translated from the Hebrew words *‘ezer kenegdo*. A more accurate translation would be “help corresponding-to-him.”⁶⁹

The noun, *‘ezer* is found 21 times in the Old Testament. It means “help,” or the older English word “succour”... The word is found twice in Genesis 2. In 16 of the other 19 occurrences of the word, the “help” spoken of refers to help which comes from one who is superior. In most cases, the “help” is God Himself... In those instances where *‘ezer* does not refer to God it is used of such people as kings, who come to the help of another. Someone who is a “help” is a powerful entity who possesses strength and resources...

The second Hebrew word *kenegdo* communicates additional meaning... What is emphasized is the common nature and essence of the two beings, as well as their equality.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Joy Elasky Fleming with J. Robin Maxon, *Man and Woman in Biblical Unity* (Minneapolis: CBE, 1993), 8.

Questions:

- What is the meaning conveyed by the two original Hebrew words that were translated here as “helper suitable”?
- What was the problem perceived by God in verse 18? What was the solution He had for the problem? How were the two connected?
- Why didn’t God wait till Eve was formed so that He could bring the creatures to both of them to be named?
- Could the fact that God brought the creatures to Adam to be named imply Adam was superior? Or could it be that God wanted to show Adam something else by bringing all the creatures to him?
- What is significant about the way the woman was made?
- Did the man take any active part in the forming of the woman?
- What does the man’s reaction when he saw the woman say to you?
- Did the man name the woman like he named the other creatures?
- In 2:24, who was the one who “moves”? Does that sound familiar to what you see in the actual practice in your culture?
- What does “both naked and they felt no shame” in 2:25 imply?

The Fall**Read Genesis 3:6-13**

3:6-13

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

Questions:

- When were the eyes of the man and the woman opened? What could that imply?
- The woman and the man both ate the fruit and that was wrong. Is there any difference in the nature of their sin? (cf. 1 Tim. 2:14)

⁷⁰ Ibid., 8-9.

- What were the effects of sin as seen in 3:7? What was their allegiance at that moment? What was missing in that picture?
- What were the emotions shown in 3:10 that did not exist before?
- What was God's first question and was the man answering the question? Why?
- What were God's next questions for the man? What was God doing here?
- What could the man's answers be?
- What did the man say instead? What was he doing here?
- How did the woman's response to God differ from the man's?

The Bad News and the Good

Read Genesis 3:14-24

3:14-24

So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Note: This is an all too familiar passage, and many people simply assume that they know what the passage is talking about. Many people will think this is the "curse" passage and that the serpent, the man and the woman were all cursed. The serpent was cursed and that is why we see the serpent crawling on the ground today. Man was cursed and that is why people have to work so hard to make a living. Woman was cursed and that is why childbirth is so painful. Worse still, man is to rule over woman and that is a fact that we better accept it rather than fight over it. But actually this is poor exegesis and what God said here is not all bad news.

Questions:

- Who was talking here? Who were being addressed to?
- Do you see any similarities among the three addresses or between any two?
- What were the similarities? What could that reveal?
- Now what were being cursed?
- What could be the “good news” in 3:15?
- Look at 3:16 and 17 King James Version (which is a more accurate translation here):

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow (great effort) thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

What would be a common experience to the woman and the man here?

- What has not changed in 3:16 compared to what God said earlier in 1:28?
- If God did not curse the woman, why was it that the woman would bring forth children with great effort?
- Why did God have to foretell the woman about the pain in childbirth?
- Does “desire” in 3:16 necessarily carry any bad connotation? Was there any dramatic change in the way she treated her husband after the Fall?
- What was the man going to do with the woman? Was that a description or prescription? How was that reflected in later verses?

Conclusion:

The God-intended, one-flesh relationship between the first couple was destroyed when sin entered the world. Adam willfully disobeyed God while Eve being deceived, fell into transgression. God cursed neither the man nor the woman. He only cursed the serpent and the ground. Yet death was already in the working as the penalty for sin and mortality became a fact of life. Both were to experience sorrow and toil while the woman would experience added pain in her childbirth. The good news was God did not rescind His original blessing as to have them be fruitful and multiply, yet the relational dynamics between the man and the woman were no longer the same. Whereas the woman’s desire was still for the husband, the husband would turn around and rule over her. This was God’s prediction of what would happen, but never His prescription of what should take place.

Oneness is still God’s ideal for marriage. Yet it will not come naturally for nothing is “natural” after the Fall. Much grace and perhaps grace alone is what can make this original ideal happen, even though not in full measure on this side of the Garden.

Taking a closer look at what actually happened in the Garden and what God did really say at the most tragic event that literally changed the course of history and affected the whole human race could perhaps soften our hearts towards one another, for we are all sinners from within or without. It could also help us appreciate His mercy and grace more, for without which we could have fallen much lower. Thank God for His love and

forgiveness that He already had redemption in place before the punishment of sin was fully displayed.

God made man and woman to be one with Him and with one another. Communion with God and with one another in love is what humankind is created for. It is also in such a relationship marked by oneness and intimacy that true satisfaction is found and deep longing is met.

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APPENDIX D

Christian Marriage the Spirit-Filled Way: A Study on Ephesians 5: 18-33

Introduction:

The last portion of Ephesians 5 is a favorite passage that people use often in weddings, pre-marital counseling, marriage conferences and even Sunday sermons. The most familiar, traditional teachings from this passage are that: the husband is the head of the household, the wife is to submit to the his leadership, he is the designated one to make all important final decisions regarding household affairs, and that he is the spiritual leader in the family and has God-given authority over his wife. Some people will go further as to say that after the father, the sons are the next in line to be the head of the family. And by “head” it is assumed to mean “authority,” “power over” and “decision maker.” A doctrine of male headship/leadership has been developed from this passage.

The objective of this study is to take a thorough look at this passage taking into consideration the historical/cultural background from which the author was writing this epistle, the grammatical/biblical context of the passage and also the consistency of its teaching with the rest of the Scripture.

Read Ephesians 5:18-33

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,

Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body.

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Note: Understanding what kind of cultural background was in place when Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Ephesus is essential when we look at this passage. Marriage during that time in that culture could be likened to a form of slavery. Teenage girls were wedded to men much older than they were, usually in their thirties. The primary objective for the men in finding a wife was to bear them a legal heir. Love and affection were simply not expected in a marriage. Rather, the wife was expected to “obey” their husband. Male headship was simply assumed and exercised as a matter of fact. Generally speaking, the women had neither rights and nor voice. It is in this kind of background that Paul was addressing the husband and wife how they should treat one another now that they were both members of God’s household (Eph. 2: 19).

The Key Commandment

Read: Eph. 5:18-21 King James Version:

*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;
Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;
Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name
of our Lord Jesus Christ;
Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*

Questions:

- From the sentence structure as shown in the King James Version (which is a more accurate translation from the Greek compared to New International Version), what is the command given here?
- From the tense of the command given, what do you learn about this command?
- What expressions are used to talk about being filled with the Holy Spirit as shown here?
- As shown in verse 21, on what basis are believers to submit to one another?
- What does “submit” here mean? How do you put that into practice? Please give some specific examples.

Wives, Listen

Read Eph. 5:22-24

Questions:

- In the original Greek, there is no verb in verse 22, the verb “submit” is “borrowed” from verse 21. How does this fact help you understand verse 22?
- What is the difference between “submit” and “obey”? What is the significance about the voice used here for the verb “submit”?
- If in Paul’s days, wives were expected to obey their husbands anyway, what could be so revolutionary about Paul’s teaching here?
- What could “as to the Lord” here mean?
- What does the metaphor in verse 23 mean? What is being emphasized here regarding Christ being the head of the church?
- When you think of one’s head and body, what are the associations that first come to your mind?

- What should the wife submit to her husband “in everything” (v. 23) rather than only when there is a difference in opinion/preference? What could that imply?

Husbands, Listen

Read Eph. 5:25-33

Questions:

- In Paul’s days husbands were not expected to love their wives. Wives were regarded as inferior beings in general. With that in mind, what makes Paul’s admonition to the husbands so revolutionary?
- What are some specifics that Paul suggests here as the ways a husband should love his wife? (vv. 25-29)
- Compare the length of Paul’s admonition to wives and husbands, what do you find? Considering the marital situation as it was like in Paul’s days, does this speak anything to you?
- What does “for this reason” in v. 31 refer to? (cf. Gen. 2:24) (Pay attention to the context when this verse was first recorded.)
- The word “reverence” in v. 21 and “respect” in v. 33 have the same root. Verse 33 can be looked at as a direct continuation to verse 21 separated by a long digression in thought.⁷¹ With that in mind, how does that help you understand how the husband and wife should treat one another?

Christians, Think Again!

Questions:

- Is there any difference in your understanding about “submission” after this study? If yes, can you elaborate more?
- Do you think Paul is talking about authority of one over the other here? Why or why not?
- What does the “head and body” metaphor have to do with the “one-flesh” relationship?
- Do you think “male headship” is a biblical concept? Why or why not?

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⁷¹ Bruce C. E. Fleming, *Familiar “Leadership” Heresies Uncovered* (Eugene, Or: Resource Publications, 2005), p. 184.

APPENDIX E

Hosting Heaven at Home: A Non-Traditional Look at Christian Marriage

The Mystery of Marriage

“My lover is mine and I am his.”⁷²

“Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love, rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned.”⁷³

“There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden.”⁷⁴

“ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.”⁷⁵

Marriage is a profound mystery. It can be mysteriously fulfilling and it can be mysteriously frustrating. A great marriage can be like having heaven on earth. A poor marriage can be like putting hell in one’s house. After quoting Proverbs 31:10-11: “A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value”; Mike Mason says in his book, *The Mystery of Marriage*, that “there is nothing in the world worse than a bad marriage, and at the same time nothing better than a good one.”⁷⁶ Also, he writes, “A good Christian

⁷² Song of Songs 2:16.

⁷³ Song of Songs 8:6-7.

⁷⁴ Proverbs 30:18-19.

⁷⁵ Ephesians 5:31-32.

⁷⁶ Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1985), 24.

marriage... is more than a religious metaphor: it is a first tangible and visible and most glorious fruit of the Kingdom of God.”⁷⁷

Yet in reality, how many marriages truly reflect the kingdom? “It is estimated that only five percent of marriages are truly happy and fulfilling unions, while in most of the others, presumably, the thought of the dreadful ‘mistake’ that has been made is carried around constantly like a splinter in the heart.”⁷⁸ According to a George Barna report, among married born-again Christians, 35 percent have experienced a divorce. That figure is identical to the outcome among married adults who are not born again: 35 percent.⁷⁹

Why So Difficult?

The Marriage license is perhaps the only license for which one does not have to pass any examination, or get any education or receive any training in order to get. The only criterion to get a marriage license is that two consenting adults show up in the county clerk’s office and pay a certain fee to obtain the license. It is also perhaps the license that is being voluntarily revoked the most. Christians and non-Christians alike get married all over the world in all cultures. Yet the fact that in the United States more than one-third of marriages end in divorce among believers and non-believers alike shows that having a Christian faith does not give any more “insurance” to sustain a marriage longer than those who do not possess that same faith. At least that is what the statistics reveal.

Why is marriage so difficult? Why are there so many lovers who end up hating each other much more than they loved each other in the first place? Why are there so

⁷⁷ Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1985), 24.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁷⁹ “*Born Again Christians Just As Likely to Divorce As Are Non-Christians*,” Barna Research Group, September 8, 2004, at: <http://www.barna.org>.

many broken families and broken hearts as a result of two people living their lives together? What does the Word of God have to offer?

The Word of God Regarding Marriage—Bonding or Binding?

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).

Indeed the Word of God has a lot to offer regarding marriage because God the creator of all is also the one who creates marriage. Yet among Bible-believing evangelicals, a sharp divide exists between those who hold a hierarchical/traditional view of marriage versus those who hold an egalitarian view regarding marriage. Traditionalists believe the Bible teaches male headship (interpreted as leadership) while egalitarians believe gender equality has always been God’s intent.⁸⁰ In other words, the debate between traditionalists and egalitarians hinges on the doctrine of male headship. Now what if male headship is indeed not biblical? What if male headship is actually a form of male domination as described by God after the fall, only that it comes in a much more subtle, covert form for it is disguised in the name of orthodoxy? And what if each person indeed has to be accountable for what he or she has done before the Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10), such that God will not hold the husband alone accountable for leading the family like James Dobson suggests?⁸¹ What if male headship is indeed a heresy that keeps both man

⁸⁰ In 1991, the book *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* was published by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood as a response to *Evangelical Feminism* hoping that “it might lead to a constructive solution to this controversy” (xiii). On the other hand, in 2004, as a result of a collaborative effort of a diverse group of evangelical scholars united by two convictions: that the Bible is the fully inspired and authoritative Word of God, and that it teaches gender equality in church, home and society, the book *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy* was published.

⁸¹ James Dobson is quoted by John Piper in his chapter titled “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity” in *RBMW* (39) that he has called the recovery of the leadership of husbands at home as “America’s greatest need.” As quoted by Piper, here is what Dobson says in his book, *Straight Talk to Men and Their Wives*

and woman in darkness and bondage and confusion? What is the risk of living in an egalitarian manner if indeed male headship is God's intent? What about vice versa?

Whereas numerous volumes have been devoted to the teaching of male headship, the purpose of this booklet is to show why the familiar teaching of a hierarchical marriage as we know may well be preventing marriage from becoming what God desires it to be. Let us now revisit some familiar arguments for male and see if they are indeed valid.

1. Is it valid to use creation order to support male headship?

Many patriarchalists have taken the fact that man was created before woman as recorded in Genesis 2 as a theological ground to support male headship as a timeless, trans-cultural principle that Christians need to live by. But to argue that the man is superior because he was created before the woman is stretching the account too far. As Elaine Storkey points out, "The reverse argument would hold equally well, that as the creation proceeded from lower to higher forms of life the woman as the last created was the most sublime."⁸² Likewise, Bilezikian also says,

The argument for male superiority drawn from Adam's primacy easily boomerangs against itself. The logic of the sequence of the days of creation moves from the void of nothingness to increasingly sophisticated modes of existence: brute matter, the vegetable realm, the animal kingdom, human beings. If Adam were considered the prototype of humanity, Eve would qualify as its supreme expression. Her formation would have brought God's works of creation

(Waco: Word Books, 1980), "A Christian man is obligated to lead his family to the best of his ability... If his family has purchased too many items on credit, then the financial crunch is ultimately his fault. If the family never reads the Bible or seldom goes to church on Sunday, God holds the man to blame. If the children are disrespectful and disobedient, the primary responsibility lies with the father... not his wife..."

⁸² Elaine Storkey, *What's Right With Feminism* (London: SPCK, 1993), 154.

to completion, moving from His image made from clay to its perfected duplication made from man.⁸³

Piper and Grudem responded to this challenge by saying that “The contextual basis for this argument in the book of Genesis is the assumption throughout the book that the ‘firstborn’ in a human family has the special right and responsibility of leadership in the family.”⁸⁴ And that does not include animals. But the fact is that “Scripture often overturns primogeniture values” as in the case of “Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Judah, David and Solomon, all of whom were preeminent and none of whom were the firstborn.”⁸⁵

Not addressing the fact that many examples of the preeminent were not being the firstborn, Piper and Grudem went on to say one needs to ask “What *does* this sequence mean?” and “Why didn’t God create them simultaneously out of the same dust?” They concurred with Ray Ortlund Jr.⁸⁶ and thought “the most natural implication of God’s decision to bring Adam onto the scene ahead of Eve is that he is called to bear the responsibility of headship.”⁸⁷

To address Piper and Grudem’s question regarding what the sequence of creation means, one needs to further ask, “What does this sequence mean to *whom*?” Sequence may mean a lot to humans, who are finite beings; but it may mean nothing to God. He simply is not bound by time and space: “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day” (2 Peter 3:8). Would God have been “surprised” by His own creation and found that it was not good for man to be alone only after He created

⁸³ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Role* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 30-31.

⁸⁴ John Piper and Wayne A. Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism (RBMW)* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 81.

⁸⁵ Sarah Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 255.

⁸⁶ This is referring to the chapter “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1-3” Ortlund wrote in *RBMW*.

⁸⁷ *RBMW*, 81.

Adam? Or when God created Adam, did He already have Eve fully in mind? The implication of creating Adam and then Eve may not so much be Adam's headship as what patriarchalists insist but rather the fact that Adam is truly "incomplete" in himself. Not only does Adam need a companion, he needs someone who can "complement" him. That may be also why God did not create another man to accompany Adam, as another man may not be "suitable" or "adequate" enough for Adam. Looking at Adam's physiological make up, it is obvious that God has never intended to make only one gender of human race. It is indeed as Genesis 1:26 says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." So whereas people may add "meaning" to the sequence of creation to "imply" their doctrine of male headship, the rationale behind either backfires or being too simplistic to convince. To argue that God intentionally made Adam before Eve to imply male headship is reading our conclusion into the text that simply is not saying that. It is not unlike saying that Eve is superior to Adam because the Bible never says whether or not He would have still needed to make Adam to complement Eve if he had created her first, as Eve could have been "whole" in herself; or that unlike Adam, given her unique communication skills, she might have found total satisfaction simply by her communion with the Lord. Of course one may not want to push so far as to come to this implication, just as one should not come so far as to assert a male headship which is never explicit in the Word.

2. Is wife's submission to her husband a command or the expression of one being filled with the Holy Spirit?

Submission no doubt is one of the key concepts regarding marital relationship. It is also one of the most mistreated, misguided and abused concepts within marriage.

People argue over whether the paragraph in Ephesians should begin in verse 21 or verse 22.⁸⁸ The debate is significant because in this case, whether the paragraph begins in verse 21 or verse 22 might imply whether mutual submission or unidirectional submission is the biblical mandate for husband-wife relationship.

A closer look at Ephesians 5 reveals that the paragraph might well begin in verse 18 because it is where the closest imperative is found. So instead of beginning the paragraph from either verse 21 or verse 22, if one begins at verse 18, the unit of thought makes a lot more sense. Paul's injunction here is that believers have "to be filled with the Holy Spirit." A list of participles then follow to show what one will be doing as he or she is being filled with the Holy Spirit. A. Nyland translates Ephesians 5:18-22 as follow:

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to desperation. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, while you are chirping to yourselves in songs of praise, festive instruments to the Lord with all your heart. Always offer thanks for everyone in the Name of our Lord Jesus the Anointed One to God the Father. Be filled with the Spirit, while you are supporting one another out of respect for the Anointed One, wives with your own husbands, as with the Lord.⁸⁹

A few observations are made here: i) Submission, whether mutual submission to one another or wife's submission to husband, is never a direct command from Paul. It is rather a result of a life being filled with the Holy Spirit. ii) Since the Greek used for submission in this passage is in the middle voice, it means it is something one does voluntarily to oneself. "It's not the husband's responsibility to get her [the wife] to submit; it's hers."⁹⁰ It is also not the pastors' responsibility to ask the wives to submit to their husbands, nor book authors or conference speakers. The kind of emphasis we put on wifely submission should be parallel to the emphasis we put on "speaking to one another

⁸⁸ Sarah Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 154.

⁸⁹ A. Nyland, *The Source New Testament* (Australia: Smith Stirling Publishing, 2004), 500.

⁹⁰ Sarah Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 170.

with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs,” “singing and making music to the Lord,” “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything” and “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ,” for it is precisely when we obey Paul’s injunction to be filled with the Holy Spirit that these practices are possible. When one shifts the emphasis of this passage from Paul’s injunction for the believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit to making it a mandate for wives to submit to the husbands, the thrust of the passage is lost. True submission is a heart condition that can only be enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit, whether it is submission toward one another, or from the wife to the husband. Whenever one neglects the spiritual enablement for one to submit, the submission that is seen may well be outward legalistic conformity out of fear of man rather than genuine humility out of reference for Christ.

3. When a line of authority exists in marriage, what is in jeopardy?

Patriarchalists who believe male headship is a biblical mandate often try very hard to differentiate male headship from male domination. Whereas their kind intention should be honored, it is also almost like a Freudian slip. For it is obvious that when egalitarians argue that the Bible does not endorse male headship, they mean male headship. Of course they know male headship is not equal to male domination for male domination is evil and a sin. It is not even worth discussing. On the other hand, when patriarchalists try so hard to stress the difference between the two, does it also reveal the fact that there really is only a very fine line between the two?

No matter how nice, or inoffensive one tries to define male headship, the bottom line comes to “who has the final word” or “who has the upper hand.” In other words, it has to do with who has more “power” in the relationship.

When God created Eve for Adam, He did not create someone for Adam to rule over. God already gave Adam authority to rule over all the earth (c.f. Gen. 1:26). God created Eve so that Adam could have someone who was distinctively suitable for him that he could relate to in the deepest way possible and share his life with in total transparency and unashamed nakedness. In other words, before the Fall, Adam and Eve had what a marital relationship was intended to bring them: communion, oneness and intimacy.

When power becomes an issue in marriage, intimacy cannot thrive. “Power protects and defends itself against the other person. Intimacy opens itself up.”⁹¹ Power and intimacy seem to go in two opposite directions. One draws the other person toward you, one pushes the other person away and sets up a wall in between.

Power says, “Because I feel inadequate, I’m going to work hard to hide my vulnerability and need; I’m going to beat you down before you beat me down.” Intimacy says, “Because I know I am incomplete on my own, I want you to be part of me.”

Power trusts only its own control over another. Intimacy ventures into an ever more trusting relationship.

Power frustrates intimacy. Intimacy takes away the need to wield power.

When a couple is primarily concerned about who is going to have control in their marriage, intimacy is not working for them... Marriage was designed as a refuge where a man and a woman could meet each other’s needs, not as an arena for power struggles.⁹²

What good will it be for a man if he gains all the power in his marriage, yet forfeits the intimacy with his wife? Or what can a man give in exchange for the one thing that he desires the most in life? It is not power, not control, but communion with someone

⁹¹ Truman Esau, *Making Marriage Work* (USA, SP Publications: 1990), 111

⁹² Ibid., 111-112.

close to his soul. When a line of authority exists in marriage, it takes away what marriage is originally designed for: intimacy.

4. What is at stake when “official authority” is transplanted into an organic relationship like marriage?

According to Frank Viola, there are two kinds of authorities. “Official authority is authority vested in a static office that works regardless of the actions of the person who populates the office. Official authority is fixed, positional authority. As long as the person holds office, he has authority.”⁹³ On the other hand, “organic authority is authority that is based on spiritual life. Organic authority is communicated authority. That is, when a person communicates God’s life through word or deed they have the support and backing of the Lord Himself.”⁹⁴

Judith and Jack Balswick, when talking about marriage as a partnership of equals, also express a similar concept:

Power is the ability to influence. Spousal power can be either achieved or ascribed. Achieved power is based on personal resources that are valued by both spouses. Each spouse has personal relational qualities that have significant influence in the relationship and are valued by the other spouse. The greater one’s resources, the greater the potential influence (power) in the relationship.

In contrast, ascribed power “comes with the position.” In a patriarchal system the husband has power over the wife simply because he is male. This is a position of power that is culturally endowed, solely by virtue of gender. He has certain rights and privileges that go along with the position. He hasn’t had to earn it or prove it, it is a given! In fact, he can do what he likes even if it’s selfish.⁹⁵

It is easy to see that “official authority” matches the concept of “ascribed power” while “organic authority” matches that of “achieved power.” Although using different

⁹³ Frank Viola, *Who is Your Covering?* (USA: Present Testimony Ministry), 70.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁹⁵ Judith K. Balswick and Jack O. Balswick, “Marriage as a Partnership of Equals” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed., Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 450.

terminologies, both sets of authors come to a similar conclusion. In Viola's words: "It is a profound mistake to transplant official authority into the Christian assembly—or into any other sphere of organic relationship (such as marriage)."⁹⁶ Likewise, the Balswicks observe that, "Because the husband's power is ascribed, there is no way for a wife to have equal power. The tendency in any social system based on inequality is for the more powerful to coerce and the less powerful to manipulate."⁹⁷ And why is an equal partnership marriage superior? As quoted before, it is because:

In equal partnership marriages the locus of authority is placed in the relationship, not in one spouse or the other. Even though it may take longer to arrive at a joint decision, as the couple listens, honors and respects each other's opinion, they move toward a united stance. It adds the dimension of "we-ness" and mutual accountability as each one takes a responsible role in decisions that are made.⁹⁸

Official authority (or ascribed power) is necessary to keep order in a society. That is why we have policemen and security guards. Yet it can be detrimental in any organic relationship like that between husband and wife. A marital relationship should be marked by love and mutual respect rather than law and order.⁹⁹ When the kind of authority that exists in marriage comes from without rather than from within, that is, an official authority rather than organic, the marriage will likely become rigid and mechanical, lacking life and spontaneity.

5. Could the practice of male headship (a controversial teaching) be easily turned into male domination (a fallen and sinful condition)?

⁹⁶ Frank Viola, *Who is Your Covering?* (USA: Present Testimony Ministry), 80.

⁹⁷ Judith K. Balswick and Jack O. Balswick, "Marriage as a Partnership of Equals" in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 451.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 452.

⁹⁹ It is worth noting that the only passage in the New Testament that addresses authority explicitly in marriage is found in 1 Corinthians 7:2-5. And it is mutual authority over each other's body that was being stressed there.

The Bible never mentions “headship.” It only mentions “the head.” “Male headship” is a concept deduced by man. The teaching of male headship is at best a controversy and at worst a heresy. Views on both sides abound. Evangelical patriarchalists are careful enough to emphasize male headship is not the same as male domination. Male domination is a condition after the Fall that God described but never endorsed. It is a cruel fact happening throughout history and across all cultures in different shapes and forms. Foot binding in China, female circumcision in Africa, burqa wearing in Afghanistan, and all kinds of wife abuse all over the world are just a few examples of how women are being oppressed then and now. For those who believe the Bible teaches male headship that the husband has God-given authority over their wife, the danger is that male headship has a great propensity to become male domination. A lot of domestic violence begins with a small quarrel. The ugly male domination that sometimes follows may simply be the abuse of an acceptable form of male headship as defined by some evangelical patriarchalists. As pointed out by social scientist Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen in her book *Gender & Grace*, “next to alcohol and drug abuse the most reliable predictor of wife battering is zealous, conservative religiosity.”¹⁰⁰ We may not be able to remove male domination in the world, but we can at least eliminate a possible seed among the Family of God by keeping the teaching of male headship at its rightful place, that is: a controversial implication at best, and a detrimental heresy at worst.

6. Will the saying that “Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely” also apply in a hierarchical marital relationship?

Another danger of ascribing husbands unlimited power in the name of male headship within a marital relationship is that it may easily degenerate into corruption. Not

¹⁰⁰ Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *Gender & Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 244.

many people can handle an unlimited, permanent supply of power with uncompromising integrity. A privilege may indeed become a curse. “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (Prov. 14:12).

7. Will a hierarchical marriage cause the husband, not just the wife, any harm?

When one looks at a hierarchical marriage, the first thing one sees is how “unfair” woman is being treated. Yet, after more pondering, one may discover that it is indeed also severely hurting the man. As Elaine Storkey eloquently expresses,

Cultural stereotypes have prevented men too from knowing real freedom. Men in the Church have been stunted in their growth towards Christian maturity, as they are unable to experience the blessings which follow from being emptied of self and naked in one’s vulnerability.

...many men feel the need to distance themselves as far as possible from their feelings...The only feelings men are allowed to exhibit are ones of anger, irritation or impatience.

...embedded in many marital problems is a husband’s inability to show affection and share himself in a deep and personal way.

...Patriarchal values of dominance and power-seeking have their grips on men, whether at work, driving a car, or in the home, and enslave them as much as women.¹⁰¹

Similarly, Truman Esau, a medical doctor, also observes how marriages that adhere to a rigid hierarchy are keeping both partners in pain. When the husband sees himself as having to shoulder all the responsibility for the marriage and the family, it is no wonder he requires absolute obedience.

He [The husband] has no recourse but to be perfect—or at least to be seen as perfect, invulnerable, and infallible. Rather than sharing the depth of his life with his wife, letting her know his insecurities and inadequacies, the husband is isolate. He is not free to be human, to reveal needs or uncertainties or to show tenderness. If his wife or children dare to voice differing opinions or wishes, he feels

¹⁰¹ Elaine Storkey, *What’s Right With Feminism* (London: SPCK, 1993), 163-164.

threatened. Trapped in rigidly defined roles, his wife and his children are deprived of the kind of caring they need from him, and he misses out on the kind of support he needs from them. He returns to an aloneness worse than that experienced by Adam before Eve was created, since Adam at least had unbroken communion with God.¹⁰²

Evangelical feminism does not exist to liberate women only. It exists also to liberate men, and as a result, children as well!

8. Whereas there is no middle ground between the two views: male headship (interpreted as leadership) and biblical equality; consistency and personal integrity demand those who believe in male headship to live out its full implication which is extremely difficult to define. Will this hence lead to an inevitable cognitive dissonance or a perpetual vicious cycle?

Although there is a spectrum of views on the topic of gender equality (or inequality), the fundamental divide is: “do wives share equally with husbands in leadership and decision making in marriage, or does the husband have a unique responsibility and privilege to make final decisions, based on his gender alone?”¹⁰³ There can be two different kinds of patriarchy, hard and soft, as defined by the Balswick’s. “In hard patriarchy, husbands make critical and final decisions and wives willingly submit to the husband’s authority over them. Soft patriarchy emphasizes a suffering servant model of the husband’s leadership.”¹⁰⁴ Yet the assumption that authority is inherent in the position of the husband remains untouched. So whether the husband exerts his leadership as a servant or as a tyrant, he is endowed with unique authority over his wife. In other words, either husband and wife share equal authority and responsibility in their marriage or they do not. There is no middle ground.

¹⁰² Truman Esau, *Making Marriage Work* (USA, SP Publications: 1990), 120.

¹⁰³ Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and Ronald W. Pierce, “Introduction,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 17..

¹⁰⁴ Judith K. Balswick and Jack O. Balswick, “Marriage as a Partnership of Equals,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 449.

Now for those who reject the notion of biblical equality, how are they going to live out the full implication of male headship in their marriage? Does male headship also imply that the husband is the spiritual leader of the wife? Does male headship also mean that the husband is the designated person to initiate all family activities? Does the wife have to seek approval from the husband for every decision she makes? Or if she has the freedom to make decision in “small matters,” then who is the one to decide what is small matter and what is not? Where does one draw the line to make sure that the wife does not “usurp” the husband’s authority? Does male headship also mean the wife cannot correct her husband’s mistakes, give him advice and make suggestions that are contradictory to his preference? Does male headship also mean the wife should never “direct” her husband to see something because that is also a kind of leadership? The list is endless. For those who genuinely want to live out this doctrine, they may soon find out that what they practice is far from what their belief demands. Sooner or later there will be cognitive dissonance that causes one to find out what indeed is the “truth.” In that case, the result is either a different conclusion will be drawn or the vicious cycle will continue.¹⁰⁵

9. Will the role of the Holy Spirit be obscure in the marriage where the husband alone makes all the final decisions?

In John Piper’s words, “in a well-ordered Biblical marriage both husband and wife acknowledge in principle that, if necessary in some disagreement, the husband will

¹⁰⁵ The “vicious cycle” here means since the implication of “male headship” is extremely difficult to define or confine, both the husband and wife may find that they are not leading enough or submitting enough respectively and may have a perpetual sense of not knowing if they are carrying out the biblical mandate adequately. In order to bridge the gap between what they believe and what they practice, they will either try to find out what the Bible really teaches and draw an entirely different conclusion or accept the status quo. But if they accept the status quo and believe the Bible does teach male headship, they will once again try to live out the biblical mandates. But the ambiguous nature of the definition of “male headship” will not change and they will soon find themselves in that position of not knowing if they have “stepped across the line” from time to time and that will again cause cognitive dissonance and hence the vicious cycle continues.

accept the burden of making the final choice.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, whenever the husband and wife cannot come to agreement, it is the husband who makes the final decision of which is the way to go.

Now let us examine how this principle plays out in real life. Generally a couple will face four different kinds of decisions in their everyday life. The first one pertains to personal preference. Things such as where to go for dinner, which dress to buy, where to go for vacation, etc. belong to this category. Common sense will say that both the husband and wife’s preference should be honored pretty evenly to grow a healthy relationship. Usually this is not much an issue.

The second kind of decision has to do with moral principles. Here biblical principles will be the authority that both the husband and wife should live by. There is not much room for negotiation or disagreement here either.

The third kind of decision has to do with one’s expertise in respective areas. Say, if the husband is good at investment and the wife is good at making budgets, both should agree that the husband will be making most decisions regarding how to invest their resources while the wife will use her expertise to do the budget. So it is only wise to allow the one who is competent in the area to make the respective decision.

Now the final kind of decision is the most tricky, as it pertains to things that are not personal preference, not moral in nature and do not relate to either party’s expertise. This kind of decision has to do with divine guidance, that is, what the Lord’s will is for the family in terms of ministry direction, life focus etc. Regarding matters like these, it really is not whose decision will come to pass but that the Lord’s will is to be sought. The husband and wife should both ask the Lord, “Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your

¹⁰⁶ John Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” in *RBMW*, 40.

paths” (Ps. 25:4). In the New Testament, leadership is always plural and consensus is reached before decision is made. “This then becomes the decision of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰⁷ “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven” (Mt. 18:19). There is simply great power when a husband and wife can come in agreement before the Lord. What a husband and wife should strive for is to learn how to listen to one another, how to be patient and wait for the Lord, how to listen to God’s voice corporately, and ultimately how to follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance. Oneness and God’s will is what a couple should be after, not the husband’s desire.

So the whole doctrine that the “husband is the one to make the final decision” may sound appealing in theory but does not really work in real life.

10. Who should be the one and true “boss” in the marital relationship?

“Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall” (Luke 11:17). One of the beauties of Christian marriage is that it is not only a union of two persons, but three: the husband, the wife and God. Christian marriage has also been depicted as a “triangular” relationship with God on top and the husband and wife on each of the lower sides of the triangle. Now who is the “boss” in this triangular relationship? Of course God is. The key to a “successful” Christian marriage is not how submissive the wife is to the husband but how submissive both the husband and the wife are to the Lord. The more a Christian couple allows the Lord to be their Master, the less either one needs to be the master.¹⁰⁸ When patriarchalists interpret the husband as the

¹⁰⁷ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 162.

¹⁰⁸ In Esther 1:22 in the Old Testament, King Xerxes “sent dispatches...proclaiming in each people’s tongue that every man should be ruler over his own household.” Note that King Xerxes did this as proposed

“head” (interpreted as “boss”) of the household, they are really putting him in competition—not with the wife—but with the Lord.

11. What is wrong with complementarians’ advocate of husbands being servant-leaders to their wives?

Complementarians who advocate the husband as the God-ordained leader of the wife have a lot of landmines to avoid in order to keep from offending those who believe in biblical equality and also not to be mistaken as being authoritarian or power-seeking. As mentioned before, complementarians always *have to* stress that male headship is not the same as male domination. And when they believe that the husband is the leader of the wife, they always qualify the kind of leadership as servant leadership. In other words, they want to make sure that the kind of leadership they have in mind is not the traditional autocratic and hierarchical forms of leadership.

The Bible does say that “the husband is the head of the wife” (Eph. 5:23). But the implication of the husband being servant-leader to their wife as derived from this biblical metaphor needs much careful examination.

Using complementarians’ own words: “We speak of a husband bearing the responsibility of servant-leadership and a wife gladly affirming that leadership.”¹⁰⁹ They also like to emphasize the husband has a “unique role as leader.”¹¹⁰ Now first of all, although the husband being the leader of the wife is a very popular idea, it is not derived directly from the Bible. No one in the New Testament ever says that husbands should

by one of the “wise men” at his time. This was neither divine nor decreed by the Lord. It was only a suggestion given by a pagan eunuch to a pagan king.

¹⁰⁹ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, “Charity, Clarity, and Hope: The Controversy and the Cause of Christ” in *RBMW*, 414.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 415.

lead their wives. In fact, it is never said so in the Old Testament either.

“Complementarians are not interested in publicly pointing out that the words *lead, leader, servant leader and spiritual leader* cannot be found in any Bible passage on marriage.”¹¹¹

When the complementarians advocate that the husband should be the servant-leader, they are making two assumptions:

i). the word “head” in Ephesians 5:23 means “leader.”

ii). the kind of “leader” that a husband is to his wife is “servant-leader.”

The Greek word used for “head” in Ephesians 5:23 is “kephale.” Today, an array of materials can be found regarding what this word means in the original Greek by the author at that time. Since it is translated as “head” in English, traditionally the church has read into this first century Greek word the contemporary meaning of head (having authority, being first in rank, superior). As a result, “a doctrine of *headship* has been established, which often misses Paul’s point...*Headship* is an abstraction that implies ‘authority over’ in modern common usage; it is not a biblical term nor is it a biblical concept.”¹¹² One of the most extreme applications of this concept of headship is found in Mormon polygamy. The Mormons argue that “polygamy is the only way to re-establish the true church on earth. In this true church, the husband was to be the head of the wife, even as Christ was head of the church, and the truest picture of that relationship was polygamy.”¹¹³ One of the most thorough studies on the meaning of the word “kephale” was done by Berkeley and Alvera Mickelsen. They have convincingly shown how the Hebrew word *ro'sh* when translated to mean a “chief something” in the Septuagint, the

¹¹¹ Sarah Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 160.

¹¹² Alice P. Mathews & M. Gay Hubbard, *Marriage Made in Eden* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 209.

¹¹³ Ruth Tucker, “Response to ‘What Does *Kephale* Mean in the New Testament?’” in *Women, Authority & the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press: 1986), 111.

word *archon*, rather than *kephale*, is used. Also they point out that Paul could have used (or *should* have used) *exousia* (“authority”) as in Romans 13:1-2 or *archon* as in Romans 13:3 if he means authority when he says “the husband is the head of the wife” in Ephesians 5:23.¹¹⁴ Gilbert Bilezikian in the appendix of his book *Beyond Sex Roles* has written a 38-page “Critical Examination of Wayne Grudem’s Treatment of *Kephale* in Ancient Greek Texts.”¹¹⁵ His conclusion is that “the word *kephale* is never used as ‘authority’ in the New Testament. *Kephale* is used within the metaphorical system of the New Testament in a variety of settings that give it some conceptual flexibility, but always with the notion of serving the body in a creational, nurturing or representational dimension.”¹¹⁶ David Scholer, in his article “The Evangelical Debate over Biblical ‘Headship,’” gives a helpful summary as to how contemporary scholars look at the word “kephale.” Among noted scholars, Gilbert Bilezikian, Catherine Clark Kroeger and Gordon D. Fee all argue extensively that kephale means “source,” or “source of life.”¹¹⁷

In *The Source New Testament*, 1 Corinthians 11:3 is simply translated as: “Now, I want you to know that the source of every man is the Anointed One, the source of woman is man, and the source of the Anointed One is God.”¹¹⁸ In the footnote, translator A. Nyland writes, “*Kephale*, ‘source’, has been mistranslated as ‘head (over)’ by most Bible versions....*Kephale* cannot mean ‘head over someone’....The subject matter is clearly source, for Paul talks about men coming from women and women from men (verses 8, 9

¹¹⁴ Berkeley & Alvera Mickelsen, “What Does *Kephale* Mean in the New Testament?” in *Women, Authority & the Bible*, 110.

¹¹⁵ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 215-52.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 249-50.

¹¹⁷ David M. Scholer, “The Evangelical Debate over Biblical ‘Headship’” in *Women, Abuse and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Books, 1996), 45.

¹¹⁸ A. Nyland, *The Source New Testament* (Parramatta, N.S.W.: Smith and Stirling Publishing: 2004), 432.

and 12).”¹¹⁹ Likewise, when it comes to Ephesians 5:23, *The Source New Testament’s* translation is simply: “The man is the source of the woman just as the Anointed One is the source of the assembly. He himself is the protector of the body.”

So the use of *kephale* in Ephesians 5:23 to establish the doctrine of “headship” is less than convincing. To further infer “head” here means “leader” is again reading a lot of contemporary meaning into a first century word.

As mentioned before, complementarians like to emphasize that the kind of leadership they are talking about is “servant-leadership.” Besides the fact the word “kephale” doesn’t necessarily mean “head” and “leader,” complementarians are further building up their theology that “male headship implies male leadership implies servant-leadership.” Now one has to ask, if “head” does not mean “leader” in the first place, does making “leader” mean “servant-leader” justify its validity?

Whereas the intention behind qualifying the kind of leader as servant-leader as offered by complementarians is commendable, the rationale behind is questionable. “Servant-leader” is a term coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970 in a business and management context. It is since then widely used by evangelicals as the kind of “being a servant-first” leadership mentality. Yet it is very doubtful that Paul also had this concept of “servant-leadership” in mind when he was led by the Holy Spirit to pen the letter to the Ephesians. Evangelicals also like to use Matthew 20: 26-27 to support the notion of “servant-leadership.” There Jesus, in response to his disciples’ request (or to the request of the mother of the disciples) to sit at His right and left side in His kingdom, says, “Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.” Note that Jesus does not say, “Whoever wants to be

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 432-33.

great among you must be your *servant-leader*.” He simply says, “Whoever wants to be great among you must be your *servant*.” Period! Jesus never teaches his disciples to be servant-leaders. He simply asks them to be servants, just like He also came not to be served, but to serve (cf. Matt. 20:28). Similarly, evangelicals like to use John 13 where Jesus washed the disciples’ feet to validate their concept of servant-leadership. But look at the commentary by Jesus Himself, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). Jesus was demonstrating to His disciples what love is by doing what a servant did in those days, to wash people’s feet. Jesus was showing the disciples how to love one another by serving, not how to “lead” one other by serving. For those who believe servant-leadership is what they are after, they need to ask if they are willing to be servants, just servants, plainly servants, without the word “leader” attached.

Someone critiques the concept of servant-leader as follow:

A servant must be unquestioningly dedicated to serving his master's every whim. If his master wants to be a drug addict, it is the servant's duty to supply any drugs his master requests. A true servant should do precisely what his master requests regardless of whether it is good for his master. Is this a useful metaphor for a leader? Compare this model to that of a coach. A coach is like a sculptor. He has an image of what he wants to create and he will push, challenge and stretch any athlete he is coaching to shape him into the image he wants to see realized. If a leader must challenge the status quo to be a leader, it would not be inconsistent to imagine him challenging individuals also as any good coach would do. But can a servant challenge his master? A servant is essentially a slave and a slave who challenges his master is either a dead slave or a free man—hence no longer a slave. Basically, the point here is that the whole idea of leader-as-servant is conceptually bankrupt.¹²⁰

In summary, when Paul says, “the husband is the head of the wife,” “head” here can mean “source” or simply the body part “head” rather than “leader.”

¹²⁰ This quotation is found on <http://www.leadersdirect.com/critique.html#>, written by Mitch McCrimmon, Ph.D.

Complementarians who assume that “head” here means “leader” and qualify it as “servant-leader” by borrowing a modern, secular concept into the biblical context are indeed jumping too far from one place to another. In short, whereas the husband is never told to lead his wife in the Bible, complementarians’ advocacy of husbands being servant-leaders to their wives is neither explicitly taught in the Bible nor conceptually sound.

12. Is it necessary to give guidelines to show what are the appropriate and inappropriate ministries for men and women respectively?

As an extension of the male headship that complementarians hold on to, a list of ministries that they believe are appropriate for women is given in the book *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. Likewise, a list of “roles” that “might stretch appropriate expressions of femininity beyond the breaking point”¹²¹ is also provided. Examples are prime minister, school principal, college teacher and even bus driver. The point being made is “A mature woman who is married...does not welcome the same kind of strength and leadership from other men that she welcomes from her husband. But she will affirm and receive and nurture the strength and leadership of men *in some form* in all her relationships with men. This is true even though she may find herself in roles that put some men in a subordinate role to her.”¹²²

If a woman were to adhere to the guideline given here, she either has to avoid the roles listed “that might stretch appropriate expressions of femininity beyond the breaking point,” or be extremely careful about the appropriateness of her action and disposition so not to step across the lines that are both subtle and vague. It is not hard to imagine what

¹²¹ John Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity” in *RBMW*, 50.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 50.

kind of mental stress this might cause someone who simply wants to be “appropriate” and act “appropriately.” This is quite a different picture from the freedom we should have found in Christ. As Elaine Storkey points out, “Christian freedom implies being free to serve, and free to break from a mould into which we do not easily fit.”¹²³ Also, she writes:

The biblical references to marriage...leave a great deal of space for differences. There are no rigidly prescribed roles, no specified division of labour within the family, no stereotypic notions of what it is to be a man or a good housewife...the cultural idea which we have loaded into marriage and the family ...destroys Christian creativity.¹²⁴

Jesus said, “I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness” (John 10:10, GNT). He came to “release the oppressed” (Luke 4:18). He wants His disciples to know the truth, for the truth will set them free (John 8:32). “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17). The doctrine of male headship in many ways is incompatible with the New Testament spirit which emphasizes the Spirit rather than the letter (cf. 2 Cor. 3:6), essence rather than form.

The freedom to be free and the freedom to live life to its fullness are indeed the signs of a healthy marriage. The guidelines given by complementarians for what is appropriate and inappropriate for men and women put unnecessary constraints on the freedom that Christ Jesus came to give us. Again, Truman Esau writes:

In a healthy marriage, the bond seems to grow in two directions at once: the husband and wife become closer and closer in their one-flesh unity, and at the same time they become more and more distinct as individuals. Because they are being loved and accepted for who they are, they have no need to deny their differences in order to please.¹²⁵

¹²³ Elaine Storkey, *What's Right With Feminism* (London: SPCK, 1993), 172.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹²⁵ Truman Esau, *Making Marriage Work* (USA, SP Publications: 1990), 26-27.

Yes, the husband and wife will become more and more distinct as individuals, not distinct necessarily as individual male or female!

13. Does complementarians' emphasis on gender differentiation have scientific proof or biblical warrant?

Contrary to popular belief, social scientist Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen found that in all the three areas being examined—genes, hormones and hemispheres—the differences between the sexes are both smaller and more complex than people thought. “The complexity of human functioning eludes simple stereotypes about what men and women ‘are’ or ‘should be’ like.”¹²⁶ Leeuwen thus concluded, “Our lives are permeated with a God-ordained freedom and accountability that works through, but at the same time transcends, our biological assets and liabilities.”¹²⁷

Complementarians put undue emphasis on what “mature masculinity” and “mature femininity” look like when Jesus’ “call to women and his call to men were identical. The primary call to men and women is a call to discipleship.”¹²⁸ Sarah Sumner puts it succinctly:

Piper’s definitions guide people to think in terms of making it their goal to strive for “biblical manhood and womanhood.” The Bible never commands us to strive for mature masculinity or mature femininity. Instead, the Word of God calls people to become like Christ. The right question is not “Am I fulfilling my call to become a biblical man or a biblical woman?” The right question is “Am I imitating Christ.”¹²⁹

Now is there a masculine form and feminine form of the fruit of the Holy Spirit? Or both man and woman are simply “jars of clay” that contain the “treasure” to show that the all-surpassing power is from God and not from either of them? (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7)

¹²⁶ Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *Gender & Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 105.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 105.

¹²⁸ Mary Ellen Ashcroft, *Balancing Act* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press: 1996), 70.

¹²⁹ Sarah Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 86.

When the Bible says the husband and wife will unite together and become one flesh, could it imply that the main distinction is in their bodies, whereas their respective spirit and soul are not gender specific? Henri Nouwen liked to say that “what was most personal was most universal.”¹³⁰ Maybe things pertaining to the soul and spirit have much more in common than one envisions. And deep down what humanity needs, desires, aspires, suffers from are more universal than one thinks, and the distinctions between the sexes are only “skin deep.” When Jesus said, “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven” (Matt. 22:30); could it mean gender difference only pertains to this life? If indeed there are more things in common rather than different between the male and female gender, is it more accurate to refer to man and woman as “neighboring sexes” rather than “opposite sexes” as suggested by lay theologian Dorothy Sayers decades ago?¹³¹ If the marital relationship between a man and woman lasts but one life whereas their spiritual relationship as members of the body of Christ lasts through eternity, should not more emphasis be put on perfecting one’s spirituality rather than his masculinity or her femininity?

14. Should Christian marriage be kingdom-centered or male-centered as complementarians’ view on marriage tends to produce?

A prominent Christian woman and a pioneer in advocating gender equality back in the 1970s and 1980s in Hong Kong, Josephine Yan-Pui So, who founded several Christian magazines and the Breakthrough Ministries, wrote in her last article before losing her life to cancer, “self-centeredness is supposed to be the root of all evils, yet

¹³⁰ Michael Ford, *Wounded Prophet* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), xv.

¹³¹ Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *My Brother’s Keeper* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 28.

unfortunately, male-centeredness, on the other hand, has been favorably considered as ‘the foundation of family order through ages.’”¹³²

The kind of marriages complementarians advocate tend to be male-centered. As man, according to the complementarians, has the unique leadership role, has to shoulder “the burden of the final say in disagreements,”¹³³ has to “take responsibility *in general* to initiate and carry through the spiritual and moral planning for family life”¹³⁴ and even has to express his leadership “in romantic sexual relations by communicating an aura of strong and tender pursuit.”¹³⁵ It is not difficult to see that the family life will center around the man. So instead of having the husband and wife being united together as one flesh to advance God’s kingdom, the family will easily become the man’s kingdom dominated by the man’s agenda. Marriage does much more to make one happy, or two, for that matter. As Henri Nouwen reflects on this, he writes:

Marriage is foremost a vocation. Two people are called together to fulfill the mission that God has given them. Marriage is a spiritual reality....a man and a woman come together for life, not just because they experience deep love for each other, but because they believe that God loves each of them with an infinite love and has called them to each other to be living witnesses of that love. To love is to embody God’s infinite love in a faithful communion with another human being.¹³⁶

Marriage is never an end in itself. It is for holiness more than happiness. Mathews and Hubbard point out in their book, *Marriage Made in Eden*, that “marriage can be instrumental in the process of sanctification. The two-as-one-flesh relationship provides innumerable opportunities for conflict to erupt. Living with a spouse can be like rubbing against sandpaper day after day. God uses our relationships to bring us to maturity, to

¹³² Josephine Yan-Pui So, *Selected Works of Josephine Yan-Pui So* (Hong Kong: Breakthrough Ltd., 1987), 434 (translated from Chinese by author of the thesis).

¹³³ John Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” in *RBMW*, 40.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹³⁶ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Here and Now* (New York: Crossroad Publishing: 1994), 151.

nurture us in our journey toward wholeness.” One of the missions of marriage is to be “a daily, living demonstration to a watching world of the relationship of Christ to his bride, the church.”¹³⁷

Christians need to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matt.6:33). As Mary Van Leeuwen reminds us, if we make gender roles, or marriage or parenthood items of such importance, the larger call to preach the gospel and promote kingdom justice will easily be lost in the shuffle. It will then become idolatry, as we worship the creation instead of the Creator!¹³⁸

15. Does the complementarian definition of mature masculinity have any biblical ground?

Piper defines masculinity as follow:

At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man’s differing relationships.¹³⁹

Although complementarians keep affirming that “loving headship of husbands is rooted in creation before the curse,”¹⁴⁰ their argument is based on what was not seen rather than what was seen. As mentioned before, the husband is never told to lead his wife in the Bible. Adam certainly was not told to lead Eve in Genesis. And before the Fall, human needs were perfectly being taken care of, Adam had no need to “provide for” his wife. Quite the contrary, they were charged *together* to “fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). We also do not see the picture of Adam protecting Eve even at the crisis

¹³⁷ Alice P. Mathews & M. Gay Hubbard, *Marriage Made in Eden* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 217.

¹³⁸ Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *Gender & Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 71

¹³⁹ John Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” in *RBMW*, p. 36.

¹⁴⁰ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, “Charity, Clarity, and Hope: The Controversy and the Cause of Christ” in *RBMW*, 417.

moment when protection was most needed. What we see is Adam protecting himself and blaming others, even God, in face of challenge (see Gen.3:12). The complementarian definition of masculinity that highlights the man's role to lead, to provide for and to protect the woman lacks biblical evidence. It is of course fine if it is only presented as an arbitrary definition. Yet it will not be just if it is treated as a God-inspired, Bible-based doctrine, for it is not!

Conclusion

The doctrine of male headship can be devastating because the nature of it demands it becomes its own law.¹⁴¹ Either you buy it and are bound by it for the rest of your life (assuming you are not going to change your sex), or you doubt it and perhaps discover for yourself that it is totally untrue. Male headship is a belief that is beyond reason.¹⁴² It can almost be like a cult to those who simply do not listen to anything contrary to what they have believed. This is especially true for those who are enjoying the privilege implied by this doctrine. How would they want any change?

Marriage can be one of life's greatest blessings. It can also cause tremendous pain. Marriage is one of the most familiar subjects, and at the same time one of the most mysterious. As mentioned before, evangelicals differ in their view regarding whether male headship or biblical equality reflects more accurately reflects God's heart. This booklet has pointed out that the teaching of male headship is based on unproven

¹⁴¹ By this the author means if a man believes he has the so called "God-endowed" authority simply because he is a man which will always be true in this life, there is no way for someone, especially a woman, who by definition is in subjection to him, to "argue" with him on an equal ground. By definition, the man's word is the final authority. It is not a even a matter of right and wrong. It is simply a matter of who is first. And since the man occupies this "first" position simply by being a man, a fact that cannot be altered and will not change, it simply becomes an unalterable fact just like the law itself.

¹⁴² Male headship is such a controversial and complex subject that it may not be dealt with just on a rational level. There may really be spiritual forces behind it and that is why it can be so divisive, so gripping. For it may well be a deception engineered by the enemy to cause division among God's children.

assumptions, faulty logic, misinterpretations, inconsistent practices and human sinfulness.

When God created male and female in his own image (Gen.1:27), there was no evidence of any hierarchical order. “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’” (Gen.1:28) God was blessing the first couple. He was commissioning the first couple to be fruitful and fill the earth. He also gave them authority and power to subdue the earth and rule over the creatures. It was a picture of total harmony and order. The man and the woman were both blessed, commissioned and empowered by God to do what they were assigned by God to do together.

In Genesis 2:18, when God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him;” God was saying that He was going to make a “helper suitable” for Adam to take away his “aloneness.” It had nothing to do with who was superior and who was inferior, who was the master and who was the subordinate. Eve was made to accompany and complement Adam. The significance was in their relationship, not in their individual ability or competence.

Now take a closer look at Genesis 2:22-25:

Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

A perfect picture of what a marital relationship is like is embedded in these few verses. At least five qualities of the relationship between the husband and wife are found here.

i. Sameness—When Adam found Eve in front of him and said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” it was the fact that he and Eve were of the same essence that struck him.

ii. Togetherness—“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.” Husband and wife are to be united together. They are to live together, share all the good things God has created for them together, be fruitful and increase in number and to subdue the earth and rule over other creatures together. This is their common mission. This is what they receive from the Lord and to carry out in partnership with each other.

iii. Oneness—“They will become one flesh.” Oneness is what is being addressed here. Man and woman were created to become one in God’s original plan. Oneness in the marital bond is also to reflect the oneness in the Trinity. (cf. John 17:22)

iv. Exclusiveness—“A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.” The husband-wife relationship has priority over the parent-child relationship. There is a unique, exclusive intimacy between a husband and wife that is not shared within any other relationships.

v. Closeness—“The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” Before the Fall, there was total transparency and perfect intimacy between Adam and Eve. There was no shame, no guilt, no hiding, no secrets between the husband and the wife. Such relationship alone brought joy and satisfaction to the human souls beyond description.

As man and woman are of the same essence, there should not be any strife, competition or ranking between the two. They are meant to enjoy life together, not to live

a separate and lonely life. Even God is living in community in the godhead. The one-flesh relationship between the husband and wife means they are totally united. They have an exclusive intimacy that belongs only in the marital relationship. The closeness they share makes life all the more meaningful. And each second's existence in each other's company in total honesty and transparency is simply sheer delight.

This is what the original, ideal relationship between a husband and wife is like. Still, nothing hierarchical was seen here. Some people argued that since Adam called her "woman," it implied that he had authority over her. But when Adam said, "she shall be called 'woman'," it was because she was taken out of man. "Woman" is a common noun, not a proper noun. There is a difference between "naming" and "calling."

After the first man and woman committed the sin of listening to the serpent rather than God, there came fear, shame, blame, self-preservation, self-centeredness and distance between the two of them. Genesis 3:16-19 describes what the consequences of sin are. That is why ever since sin entered the world, the five qualities mentioned above in the original marriage did not come about naturally any more. Male domination is an ugly reality after the fall and is being played out everywhere across time and culture. It is something that needs to be hampered rather than enhanced.

Another key passage that people use to develop the theology of "male headship" is Ephesians 5: 21-33:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to

love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

When Paul in Ephesians 5 likened the husband and wife as head and body, why not let it mean just that: head and body? A Chinese saying goes like this: “Brothers are like hand and foot.” Now does the hand denote the elder brother while the foot denotes the younger brother? Is the elder brother more important than the younger one? Is the elder brother the leader and the younger brother the follower? No one ever asked these questions. The saying simply means brothers are closely related and connected to one another. To try to analyze more than the metaphor conveys is dangerous.

As pointed out before, to interpret “head” as leader from this passage is unconvincing. By taking “head” as simply the body part head and look at the metaphor as is, one may well appreciate the insight of Sarah Sumner:

How might the divorce rate plummet among Christians if we would recognize that God joins a man and a woman into “one flesh” through the mystery of marriage? It is not so disturbing to imagine a leader breaking up with his assistant. But it is utterly disconcerting to imagine a body being amputated physically from its head.¹⁴³

When one can see husband and wife connected organically as head and body, the image is much more powerful than seeing husband and wife as a leader and follower, or a master and subordinate, or a boss and a helper.

Sarah Sumner also did a great job by putting the three couplets from this passage as: body-head, submit-sacrifice, respect-love. When it says the husband is the head and

¹⁴³ Sarah Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 167.

the wife is the body, the emphasis is on the “one flesh” relationship of the two. It is an organic and mysterious union more than anything else. The point is that it takes the head and the body together to form a whole. The head cannot function without the body and the body cannot function without the head. They are interdependent of each other. It is not a matter of ranking or who is the boss. It is the fusing of the spirit, soul and body of two people to make it one. It is beautiful and it is God-ordained.

A wife should take the initiative to always submit to her husband, putting her husband above herself. Likewise, a husband should always consider what is best for his wife and willing to give up his own dreams and wishes in order for hers to come true. It is not leading and following. It is simultaneously considering the other as more important than himself/herself (cf. Phil. 2:3).

A man is to love his wife and a wife is to respect her husband (Eph. 5:33). But love and respect are not mutually exclusive. And there are good reasons why Paul would command the husband to love and the wife to respect.¹⁴⁴

There are other important passages on marriage such as: 1 Corinthians 13, Mark 12:31, John 15:13 and Philippians 2. Christian husband and wife are brother and sister in Christ first, spouse to one another second. Their call to be Jesus Christ’s disciple comes before their call to be a sacrificial husband and a submissive wife. “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you” (Matt. 6:33).

When two souls are melted together by love and commitment to become one flesh, there will no longer be who is first and who is last; who is to lead and who is to follow. The husband-wife relationship should be fluid and versatile.

¹⁴⁴ Emerson Eggerichs has written a book titled *Love and Respect* (Brentwood: Integrity, 2004) talking about why love and respect are so important to wives and husbands respectively and how husbands and wives should love and respect their spouses in very specific ways.

A Final Word

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Prov. 4:23).

After all, marriage is a “heart” issue rather than a “head” issue. Love is the name of the game. Not leadership or authority or role or rank! God has put in every human soul the desire to belong, to have relational intimacy and to be warmly received and loved and treasured and accepted as he is or she is. A healthy husband-wife relationship grounded in love should be marked by mutuality and reciprocity rather than rigid rules and roles. In the end, it is when both the husband and wife are filled with the Holy Spirit, submissive to Christ, love God and seek His kingdom more than anything else that the impossible becomes possible, the bondage becomes blessing and the mystery becomes sheer delight!

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